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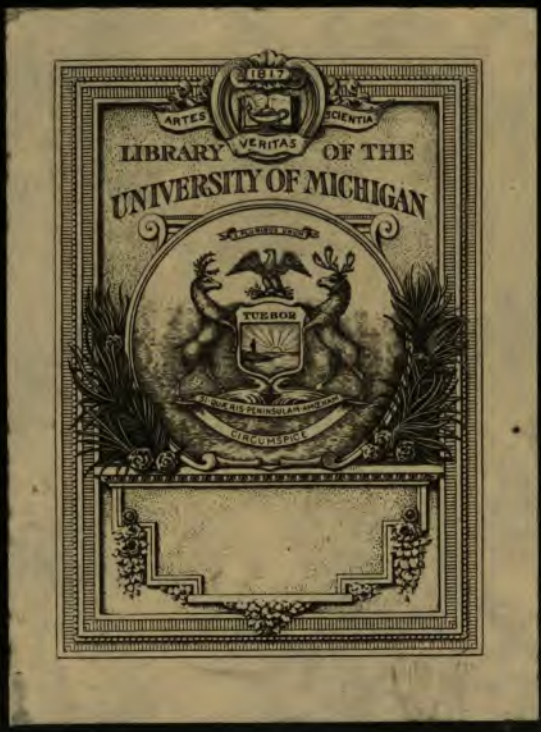
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THE WRITINGS
OF
CHARLES DICKENS
WITH
CRITICAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTIONS
AND NOTES BY EDWIN PERCY WHIPPLE
AND OTHERS

ILLUSTRATED WITH STEEL PORTRAITS AND ENGRAVINGS FROM THE ORIGINAL DESIGNS BY BROWNE, CRUIKSHANK LEECH, AND OTHERS

IN THIRTY-TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME XXII

Our Mutual Friend.

Mr Boffin engages Mr Wegg

Our Mutual Friend

Riderhood [illegible] checkmated

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

BY

CHARLES DICKENS

ILLUSTRATED WITH ENGRAVINGS ON STEEL

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
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The frontispieces are from the original drawings of F. O. C. Darley. The other illustrations were drawn by Marcus Stone.

INTRODUCTION

By EDWIN PERCY WHIPPLE

This romance was published in monthly numbers, extending from May, 1864, to November, 1865.[1] Dickens had conceived some of the characters and incidents of the story as far back as 1861. The feeling of improbability, which the least critical reader experiences in following the course of the narrative, is partly accounted for by the way in which the author picked up its materials. Almost everything in it is exceptional; but it may be said that portions which shock even the eager and ready credulity of the ordinary novel reader were founded on facts. In his wanderings by the banks of the Thames, he had seen hand-bills posted up, indicating that fishing for the bodies of persons drowned in the river was a regular business of some degraded watermen; and his ready imagination suggested the characters of Hexam and Rogue Riderhood. At Chatham, while once walking with Leech, the artist, both were struck and amused by observing a father and son together, — "the uneducated father in fustian and the educated boy in spectacles." Charley Hexam was the extension of "the educated boy." Marcus Stone, the illustrator of "Our Mutual Friend," had discovered a queer character engaged in a strange trade, and carried Dickens to see him; and the result was the introduction into the story of Mr. Venus, preserver of animals and birds, and articulator of human bones. Mr. Riah, the patriarchal and benevolent old Jew, was made quite a prominent character in the book, because a Jewish lady, whom Dickens highly esteemed, considered that Fagin, in "Oliver Twist," was calculated to bring reproach on the Jewish religion as well as on the Jewish race.

[1] In book form it appeared in two volumes published separately, the first containing a dedication to Sir James Emerson Tennent.

In repairing the wrong, Dickens fell into the opposite error of making the scapegoat of Fascinating Fledgeby altogether too noble and august a creature for the business of discounting notes of hand at extravagant rates of discount. The germ of the character of Rokesmith was contained in a letter to Forster, written some time before he concluded to make him the hero of "Our Mutual Friend." "I think," he wrote, "a man, young and perhaps eccentric, feigning to be dead, and *being* dead to all intents and purposes external to himself, and for years retaining the singular view of life and character so imparted, would be a good leading incident for a story." The Lammles and the Veneerings, who occupy such a prominent position in the satirical portions of the novel, were thus hinted at before he converted them into characters: "I have thought of a poor impostor of a man, marrying a woman for her money; she marrying *him* for *his* money; after marriage both finding out their mistake, and entering into a league and covenant against folks in general." These were to be connected with some "perfectly new people. Everything was to be new about them. If they presented a father and mother, it seemed as if *they* must be bran new, like the furniture and the carriages — shining with varnish and just home from the manufacturers."

In combining these scattered memoranda into a romance, Dickens selected "the man who feigns himself dead" as the central figure. Starting with this improbability, he heaps improbability on improbability as the story proceeds to its improbable conclusion. Mr. Boffin's relation to Silas Wegg is improbable; his affectation of turning miser in order to disgust Bella Wilfer out of her worldliness is improbable; and it is more improbable still that John Harmon should marry Bella, seemingly under the name of Rokesmith, and then live with her for more than a year without announcing his real name and the fact of his large fortune. Even if Mr. Boffin's deception was artistically justifiable up to the time Bella left his house and married his discharged clerk, the mystery should have been solved the moment she consented to become his wife; for she had shown all the disinterested affec-

tion that the most exacting lover should have required. Dickens, of course, tries to explain John's conduct by a reference to the eccentricity that had originally led him to feign being dead; but every test to which a woman's affection could be properly subjected was fulfilled when she abandoned luxury and fortune to share the fortunes of a poor clerk, ignominiously kicked out of his employment; and John Harmon's device of further testing her perfect confidence in his probity, by exposing it to the shock of seeing him arrested for murder, — the murder being committed by himself on himself, — is one of the most puerile contrivances, among the many puerile contrivances, to which writers of fiction have ever resorted. And all these elaborate improbabilities are intended to lead up to the melodramatic, the theatrical, the "stagey" scene, in the fifteenth chapter of the fourth book, where Bella is overwhelmed with wonder at the disclosure of Mr. Boffin's plan of purifying her character from its worldly taint, and of making her as good as she is happy.

But all these improbabilities and inconsistencies, which would have exposed an ordinary novelist to merciless ridicule, are redeemed by the genius with which they are inseparably connected. Simply stated, — that is, divorced from Dickens's imaginative way of representing them, — the leading incidents and characters are almost as unreal as anything in the Arabian Nights, or in the fairy stories which are the delight of childhood. It seems impossible that they could be embodied in a novel of modern English society, in the development of which thirty or forty thousand of intelligent English readers should be eagerly interested for twenty months in succession, to the extent of rushing to secure the last number of "The Mutual Friend," with news from Dickens's dreamland, as they would hasten to secure the latest edition of "The Times," with news from more actual countries. The reason is to be found in the fact that everything Dickens touched was so intensely individualized, that it became real to the heart and imagination when seemingly most unreal to the practical understanding. Why quarrel with Mr. Boffin, or Mrs. Boffin, or Mr. Silas Wegg,

or Lizzie Hexam, or Mr. Venus, or Riderhood, or any of the other characters, which are altogether outside of our own actual experience, when we feel more interest in them, either as persons to love or detest, than we do in the men and women we daily meet? The improbability being granted, everything goes on smoothly. The wit and the humor, the comedy and the tragedy, the earnest faces, all alive with human meaning, which start up from the printed page and effect a lodgment in our imagination, reconcile us to all the incongruities which cool criticism relentlessly exposes. Criticism, for instance, may prove that Mr. Boffin ought not to exist; but then the trouble remains that he *does* exist. The late Mr. Tudor, a Boston ice merchant, took it into his head that he would raise tropical fruits and flowers on the rocky shores of the bleak Nahant. The spot was certainly ill selected; all horticultural critics predicted his failure, and doubted his success until the products were palpably placed before their eyes. In doing this, Mr. Tudor wasted much money which might have been more profitably employed; but he succeeded in realizing his whim. In a similar way, Dickens squandered much genius in settling that portion of Dickens-land included in the characterization of "Our Mutual Friend;" he might have selected a better place for colonizing the beings of his brain; but still the colonists are there, as much alive as any inhabitants of Canada or Australia, and as visible to the eye of the mind as Mr. Tudor's orange flowers and pine-apples were to the bodily eye. Both, in seemingly struggling against Nature, conquered her by going through the preliminary process of obeying her; and they conquered, one in his gardens, the other in his romance, by being regardless of expense in turning her away from her instinctive process of adapting her productions to the soils where they naturally grow.

Among all the delicious oddities that Dickens has portrayed, who exceeds Mr. Boffin, as supplemented by his wife? Throwing out of view the improbability of the thing, what can be more richly humorous than Mr. Boffin's relation with Mr. Silas Wegg, his "literary man, *with* a wooden leg, who pro-

fessionally declines and falls, and as a friend drops into poetry?" From the first meeting of the patron with his hired man of letters, through all the varied incidents of their intercourse, to the time when Sloppy takes him out of the house, and pitches him, with a prodigious splash, into a scavenger's cart opportunely passing by the door, the scenes in which they appear are full of laughable matter, — an enjoyable combination of comedy and farce of which the reader never tires. The negotiation between the contracting parties is conducted and concluded on the corner of the street, where Mr. Wegg has established his business of selling ballads, apples, oranges, nuts, and gingerbread, and where he has established imaginary relations with the tenants of the neighboring mansion, whom he christens Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker, and of whom he knows nothing. As to his stock in trade, "it gave you the face-ache to look at his apples, the stomach-ache to look at his oranges, and the toothache to look at his nuts." The interview with Mr. Boffin affords Wegg an opportunity to play off his cunning against the other's simplicity and ignorance. "All Print is open to you!" exclaims the admiring Mr. Boffin. "Why truly sir, I believe, you could n't show me the piece of English Print that I would n't be equal to collaring and throwing." "On the spot?" asks Mr. Boffin. "On the spot," confidently replies Mr. Wegg. The wonder to Mr. Boffin is increased by this avowal. "Here am I," he says, "a man without a wooden leg, and yet all Print is shut to me." In the bargain that is soon after concluded, that Mr. Wegg shall read to his employer at a crown a week, the former is at first inclined to ask more for reading poetry than for reading prose; "for," he declares, "when a person comes to grind off poetry night after night, it is but right he should expect to be paid for its weakening effect on his mind." The ease with which Dickens individualizes a person, to whom he may devote only a page, is shown in the case of the hoarse man driving a donkey in a truck, with a carrot for a whip. He is introduced merely to give Wegg a lift, as he is trudging towards Boffin's Bower to

keep his appointment; and yet he is as distinctly a character as any in the novel. When Mr. Wegg, after "mellering his organ" with meat jelly, ham, and gin and water, opens the book he is to read for Mr. Boffin's edification, he finds that it is "The Decline and Fall of the Roman," instead of the Russian Empire. "What 's the difference?" Mr. Boffin asks. "The difference, sir?" Mr. Wegg falters in reply, for he knows nothing of the difference between the two. Suddenly, however, a bright thought occurs to him. "There you place me in a difficulty, Mr. Boffin; suffice it to observe that the difference is best postponed to some other occasion when Mrs. Boffin does not honor us with her company. In Mrs. Boffin's presence, sir, we had better drop it." The conception of introducing such a man as Mr. Boffin to the treasures of literature and history, by beginning with such an author as Gibbon, is a grotesquely humorous idea which nobody but Dickens could have imagined. After Wegg closes his first reading, the proprietor of Boffin's Bower is left in a horror of amazement at the strange doings of "Commodious" and "Vittle-us." Wegg, he says, "takes it easy, but upon-my-soul to an old bird like myself these are scarers. . . . I did n't think this morning there was half so many scarers in Print. But I 'm in for it now!" Up to the time he makes the acquaintance of Bully Sawyers (Belisarius), he finds nothing, in nightly declining and falling with the Roman Empire and with Mr. Wegg, which meets his own experience; and the separation of human nature in Print from human nature as he knows it by his own heart and his eyes, grows continually wider and more unaccountable. But his simplicity is accompanied with shrewdness; after Rokesmith has become his secretary, he sees through all the pretences by which a numerous variety of persons seek to plunder him; and Wegg, and Mrs. Lammle, and many others, find in the end that the Golden Dustman, by being intrinsically honest and kind-hearted, bears in his breast a talisman which enables him eventually to distinguish an honest man from a rogue, and a pretender to philanthropy from a real philanthropist.

Of Mrs. Boffin there can be but one opinion, or rather one feeling. Such a joyous, simple-hearted example of buxom beneficence, alive in every part of her soul and body, never before thrust her round, rosy, matronly face into the company of the imagined personages of a romance. A certain "vulgarity" in speech and manners, arising from her necessarily neglected education, cannot prevent us from exalting her far above any of the ladies she meets during the course of the narrative. The depth of motherly sentiment she felt for the poor, abandoned children of the curmudgeon whom she and her husband had faithfully served, is specially indicated by the delight she experiences in finding in Rokesmith the poor little John Harmon she had loved and protected as a boy, — a delight increased rather than diminished by the thought that she can give up all the wealth she so thoroughly enjoys to this equitable heir. Before, however, she makes the discovery, she engages in a search for a desirable orphan to adopt, which may remind her of her early favorite. The account of her hunting after this seemingly common urchin, allows Dickens an opportunity to introduce into his story such characters as the Rev. Mr. Milvey and his wife, Betty Higden, Sloppy, and the poor little Johnny, who is fixed upon as the most eligible among many orphans to be adopted, but who dies in the hospital before he can be transported to Mrs. Boffin's home. His death is very pathetically told. As Rokesmith and the doctor bend over the dying boy, they note some disquiet in his efforts to speak. "What is it?" they ask. Little Johnny answers, "Him! Those!" meaning by "him" the child with the broken leg, whose bed was next to his in the hospital; and by "those" the toys which were placed over his own bed, and which he has seen his small neighbor eyeing with peculiar pleasure, before he moaned himself to sleep. After "the horse, the ark, the yellow bird, and the man in the Guards" have been softly transferred to their proper destination, according to the faint pointing of his hand, he remembers Bella Wilfer, as a vision of beauty who had accompanied Mrs. Boffin in visits to his sick bed. Sustaining himself on Rokesmith's

arm, he seeks the face of the lover of Bella with his lips, and says, "A kiss for the boofer lady!" And "having," in Dickens's words, "now bequeathed all he had to dispose of, and arranged his affairs in this world, Johnny, thus speaking, left it." Is there not something exquisitely pathetic in this scene?

It is needless to say that all these proceedings fill with supreme disgust the soul of Mr. Boffin's literary man, *with* a wooden leg, who has vindicated his asserted capacity to collar and throw at sight anything which meets him in English Print, by his nightly struggles with the difficulties of Gibbon's prose. The sad ending of the hunt for an orphan gives him a corresponding pleasure. If, he sagaciously argues in his capacious mind, they wanted an orphan, why did they go beating about Brentford bushes in search of the article, when they had one near at hand? "Am I not an orphan?" exclaims Mr. Wegg in the secure lodgment he has established in Boffin's Bower; "and what more can they want?" The fact that he has been an orphan for some fifty or sixty years only intensifies his sense of injury in being overlooked. Perhaps his prowling about the house, and poking among the mounds, in order to find some means of plundering his benefactor, may have been stimulated by the bad taste evinced by Mrs. Boffin in not immediately perceiving that in him she had an orphan, eager to be adopted, on whom her matronly affection might at once be exercised, without her wasting time in fruitless researches after an impossible ideal, directed to the discovery of a tenderer and more youthful specimen than he of the orphan variety of the human species.

John Harmon, who has appeared at the inquest which announces his own death, is connected with the family of the Wilfers by being connected with the Boffin family. As he understands his father's will, the property is left to him provided he marries Bella Wilfer. He has no idea of gaining fortune by a marriage to a woman who does not love him; and after escaping from the ruffians who thought they had succeeded in sending him to that world where fortune is of little

importance, and discovering that the person killed is recognized as John Harmon, he concludes to preserve his incognito, and, as Rokesmith, to pay court to the unknown bride devised to him under the terms of the will. For this purpose he hires a room in poor Mr. Wilfer's shabby house, and becomes a secretary to Mr. Boffin. He is attracted by the beauty of Bella Wilfer, in spite of the openness with which she expresses her horror of poverty, and her determination to make, under the patronage of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, a mercenary marriage; and he finally falls desperately in love with her, declares his love, and is contemptuously rejected. He concludes to go away, leaving the Boffins in possession of his fortune, when Mrs. Boffin, looking in upon him as he broods over the fire in his room, detects the lone, lorn, despairing look which the boy, John Harmon, had so often cast up to her motherly face, and she cries, "I know you, now! You're John!" and drops fainting in the arms of her recovered favorite. From that time everything in the house is subordinated to the one purpose of enabling John to appear in a noble light to Bella, even at the expense of forcing good Mr. Boffin to assume the character of a miser, to become a regular "brown bear," a "grizzly old growler," — the benevolent old couple discussing every night, how far Mr. B.'s growing insults to John Harmon, exhibiting that gentleman in the noblest attitude of self-respect mingled with forbearance, should succeed in gradually converting Bella into a disinterested woman, ready to surrender her hopes of wealth for a portionless union with the persecuted man she had all along really loved. In the interim, John has frequent opportunities to show his superiority to the other men she meets. Before the time arrives of her leaving the Boffin mansion to be the wife of Mr. Boffin's discharged clerk, she has become acquainted with Lizzie Hexam, has been connected with other personages in the story, and, above all, has furnished the author with an opportunity to exhibit the whole Wilfer family.

As to the latter, it may confidently be said that Dickens, in none of his previous novels, had delineated a domestic group

so rich in individual qualities and humorous contrasts, as that gathered under the humble roof of Reginald Wilfer, clerk of the great firm of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles, — represented, in this romance, by Mr. Veneering, who gathers "society" around his dinner table. Whenever a Wilfer appears in "Our Mutual Friend," you may, in Joe Gargery's phrase, "look out for larks." However unpromising his family may appear to R. Wilfer, and however much that little cherub's heart may be wrung on leaving his quiet desk in the counting house for the absurd little hell which he calls his home, there can be no doubt that the reader profits by the miseries which the husband cheerfully endures. Such a household! Mrs. Wilfer is a tall, angular, majestic woman, with a head tied up in a pocket-handkerchief knotted under her chin, and with a pair of thick, worn gloves, ever on her hands, always mourning over the descent in station she had incurred in marrying R. W., and acting the part of Lady Macbeth to her liege lord in a manner that appalls that innocent gentleman, and makes him sometimes wish that she had married a person superior to him in rank; and his daughters are as distractingly afflicted with the disease of giddiness as his wife is with that of overpowering composure. The poor man finds his domestic content somewhat disturbed between the two; but Bella, the elder of the daughters, and the heroine of the story, though wilful, skittish, fretful, flighty, discontented, and in every way aggravating, "with no more character," as she afterwards confesses, "than a canary bird," still loves her father, in a half-affectionate, half-compassionate way, while as contemptuous of her mother, when she assumes her Act of Parliament tone, as her pert younger sister, Lavinia, who loves nobody, father or mother, who domineers over everybody as far as she can, and who is specially tyrannical to a cast-off, slender-witted adorer of her elder sister, named George Sampson, whom she wills to hold in her toils until she can catch some more promising specimen of the male sex, with a larger income and a better brain. From the time that Mrs. Boffin calls on Mrs. Wilfer, to carry Bella away to a happier home, — not

however before "the craft, the secrecy, the dark, deep, underhanded plotting, written in Mrs. Boffin's countenance," have made Bella's mother shudder, — to the time when Bella, as Mrs. John Harmon, welcomes the whole family to her magnificent mansion, — the Wilfers afford many delicious scenes, on which Dickens employs all the resources of his observation and humor. The father, the mother, the two daughters, are thoroughly individualized; and Bella, especially, is so perfectly represented, that we see and feel the very soul of the giddy girl, as it is whirled this way and that, — the levity of her character gradually giving way before an overmastering affection, which leaves her all the delightful spontaneousness of her original disposition, while every good quality in her nature is deepened and enlarged by it. The scene of her elopement and marriage is so narrated as to make every reader envy the happy husband. Before this occurs, however, she has been the occasion of her lover's quietly making the noblest remark to be found in all Dickens's writings. After Bella has been closeted with Lizzie Hexam, has felt the beauty of her self-abnegation, and has cheered her by her maidenly sympathy, she afterwards says despairingly to John Harmon, that she feels she is useless in this world. "No one," he replies, "is useless in this world, who lightens the burden of it for any one else." Is not here contained the very essence of practical philanthropy? The little sentence is almost worthy of being blazoned, and placed among those scriptural texts in golden letters which we often see exhibited in Christian homes, where the exhortations to a Christian life are made into artistic ornaments of the rooms, preaching continually their benignant precepts to the eye and imagination.

Lizzie Hexam is a continuation of Little Nell, of Florence Dombey, of Agnes Wickfield, of Little Dorrit, of Lucie Manette. The circumstances differ, but the root of the character, self-sacrifice, is the same. Yet we can hardly call in their case by so austere a word as sacrifice, a self-denial which is prompted by a filial and family love so deep, that not to exercise it would produce intense misery in the affectionate hearts

of which it is the spring of a healthy activity. Their self-sacrifice, in short, is but a form of self-expression. The nature being what it is, any obstruction to its outlet would be the saddest misfortune it could experience. What we admire in their disinterestedness is something as real in their characters as that impulse which urges other daughters to disregard father, mother, and brothers, in acting out their own selfish instincts. Duty, indeed, has become with them an instinct; and they not only obey its obligations with a certain joy, but they are incapable of any remorse which is not connected with some fancied oversight of an occasion where it might have been more effectively exercised. There are such young women scattered over the world; and it is the glory of Dickens that he has embodied their finest elements in ideal characters so attractive to the heart and the imagination, that to contemplate them has a direct tendency to increase the number of their actual representatives in common life. The task that Lizzie Hexam sets to herself is only more difficult than that of the other members of Dickens's saintly sisterhood, because she stands by a father who is engaged in the most repulsive and degrading of human occupations, and by a brother who is a selfish, ungrateful, conceited little snob, whose qualities require an affection almost divine to bear with for a moment. As the story goes on, Lizzie is called upon to combat a passion for Eugene Wrayburn, which further complicates her relation to her brother; for he urges her, for *his* advantage, to receive the attentions of his head master, Bradley Headstone, whom she instinctively abhors. The wretched youth thinks that his sister is obstructing his rise into respectability, by foolishly refusing a husband whom *he* has selected as a person who might benefit *him*. That his sister's soul and body are not at his service, to be disposed of in the best way to advance his interests, is an idea that Charley is at last indignantly compelled to admit; and it furnishes him, as he thinks, with a just reason for discarding her forever. The tendency of self-sacrifice to generate the most odious forms of selfishness, when the objects of it are abject natures, who receive it as one of

their rights, was never better illustrated than in the case of Lizzie Hexam and her whelp of a brother. If Lizzie had been a little more selfish, Charley would probably have grown up into a less despicable specimen of manhood, or rather mannishness.

Eugene Wrayburn is the culmination of a character which Dickens had repeatedly attempted to represent in some of his previous novels, — a dawdling, drawling young Englishman of the present day, born of aristocratic parentage, liberally educated, qualified in some degree for a profession, but still acting on the theatre of life as if, like the Duke of Orleans described Saint Simon, he had been "born bored." He is a consumer of cigars; a welcome visitor at dinner tables where he simply eats and yawns; and reaches a certain kind of social distinction by drawlingly preaching the doctrine of idleness which he somewhat laboriously practices. His friend, Mortimer Lightwood, is of the same disposition, and is indeed much surprised by the business accidentally forced upon him by Mr. Boffin and Rogue Riderhood. Both of these young gentlemen agree that if anybody would give them an opportunity really worth being energetic about, they would show energy; but as it is, they detest the name. "Am I," says Eugene, "to rush out into the street, collar the first man of a wealthy appearance I meet in the street, shake him, and say, 'Go to law upon the spot, you dog, and retain me, or I'll be the death of you'? Yet that would be energy." Mr. Boffin afterwards tells him there's nothing like work. "Look," he exclaims, "at the bees." Eugene treats this trite illustration somewhat in the style with which it had been previously played with by Harold Skimpole. "Conceding for a moment," argues Eugene, "that there is any analogy between a bee and a man in a shirt and pantaloons (which I deny), and that it is settled that the man is to imitate the bee (which I also deny), the question still remains, what is he to learn? To imitate? Or to avoid? When your friends the bees worry themselves into that highly fluttered extent about their sovereign, and become perfectly distracted touching the slightest monarchical movement, are we

men to learn the greatness of tuft-hunting, or the littleness of the Court Circular? I am not clear, Mr. Boffin, but that the hive may be satirical." Mr. Boffin replies that at all events they work. "Ye-es," Eugene disparagingly retorts, "they work; but don't you think they overdo it? They work so much more than they need — they make so much more than they can eat — they are so incessantly boring and buzzing at their one idea until Death comes upon them — that don't you think they overdo it? Are human laborers to have no holidays because of the bees? And am I never to have a change of air because the bees don't? Mr. Boffin, I think honey excellent at breakfast; but, regarded in the light of my tyrannical schoolmaster and moralist, I protest against the tyrannical humbug of your friend the bee. With the highest respect for you."

What gives some tension to the vagrant faculties of this young aristocrat is his love for Lizzie Hexam. He pursues her without any clearly defined intention either of seducing or marrying her; but he feels that he is attracted to this exceptional maiden by a moral quality in her nature, which he had never before perceived in a woman, and which stirs in him all the latent goodness in the depths of his being. This had heretofore been crusted over by all those fopperies of indifference to everything and everybody, which give distinction to the youths enrolled as members of the aristocracy which shed lustre on the vast kingdom of Boredom. Bradley Headstone, whom he goads into madness by his insults, pounds his coxcombry out of him by nearly depriving him of his existence. His rescue by Lizzie completes the reformation of his character. He marries her on his reviving sick bed, with the determination of living *for* her — of disregarding all the taunts of a "society" composed of the Veneerings, Podsnaps, and Tippinses, and of working resolutely for his living hereafter, like other self-respecting heroes of industry.

The tragic interest of the story centres in Bradley Headstone. This dogged, stolid schoolmaster of twenty-seven, the perfection of mediocrity, who conducts teaching by the latest

light afforded by "the Gospel according to Monotony," bears under his decorous vest a heart capable of the deepest passion. Miss Peecher, the perfect model of a decorous schoolmistress, has an unselfish, unutterable tenderness toward this specimen of a perfect schoolmaster. In the natural order of things, Miss Peecher should have been married to Mr. Headstone. She certainly would have made him the most affectionate of wives, aiding him in all his schemes of rigidly training pupils to learn the externals of knowledge by the most repulsive methods under which knowledge can be bullied into the juvenile mind. They seem made for each other; but Mr. Headstone becomes inflamed with a mad passion for the sister of his cherished pupil. This is opposed, not merely by the repugnance of the woman on whom his heart is set, but by the insolent rivalry of Eugene Wrayburn. The slow, accumulated results of baffled passion in a dogged nature, ulcerating the heart and depraving the will, until the apparently frigid schoolmaster, attentive merely to the details of his monotonous work, ends in being a murderer, are described by Dickens with great power of psychological observation and analysis; but the general reader has a feeling that it would have been better to exert the same power on a more attractive subject. The tragedy of Dickens is always less attractive than his pathos, though perhaps he throws more of his imaginative force into the delineation of criminal natures than into the exhibition of souls working under the influence of humane and Christian sentiments.

Dickens crowds his stories with such a variety of characters that it is difficult to do justice to them all. For example, there is in the romance of "Our Mutual Friend" a certain character called Miss Jenny Wren (*née* Fanny Cleaver), the dolls' dressmaker, and manufacturer of ornamental pincushions and pen-wipers, who is one of the quaintest of all the creations of Dickens's humorous imagination and sensitive heart. Were she not so thoroughly individualized and so thoroughly English, there is something on the poetical side of her character which might place her, as a creation, by the side

of Goethe's Mignon. The poor, little, decrepit creature, with her beautiful face and luxuriant golden hair, working to support a hopelessly drunken father, and with sufficient force of will to keep him in some order as "the child" whom she scolds and protects; indulging in the wildest fantasies of imagination while engaged in her humble tasks; ever capable of helping others while seemingly making a pathetic appeal as an object for others to help; shrewd in perception and tart in expression; with an inner world of mental experience, resembling the oddest fancies of those who dwell permanently in Wonderland, combined with outward circumstances to the last degree sordid, wretched, and unsatisfying, — this small, queer, deformed, bright-brained, good-hearted specimen of maiden humanity is really deserving of a prominent rank among the original creations of the poets and romancers of the century. The point and sparkle of her conversation, and the somewhat vixenish way in which she expresses her kind-heartedness, disdaining always to be pitied or to be assisted, only give a deeper sense of the pathetic beauty of a character, in which physical suffering is contemptuously ignored as long as the mind retains its power of thinking rapidly, and the heart its capacity of loving warmly. How exquisite is the deformed girl's statement of the consolations of her hard lot. "I dare say," she musingly remarks to Lizzie Hexam, "my birds sing better than other birds, and my flowers smell better than other flowers. For, when I was a little child, the children that I used to see early in the morning were very different from any others that I ever saw. They were not like me; they were not chilled, anxious, ragged, or beaten; *they were never in pain.* They were not like the children of the neighbors; they never made me tremble all over, by setting up shrill noises, and they never mocked me. Such numbers of them, too! All in white dresses, and with something *shining on the borders and on their heads,* that I have never been able to imitate with my work, though I know it so well. They used to come down in long, bright, slanting rows, and say all together, 'Who is this in pain! Who is this in pain!'

When I told them who it was, they answered, 'Come and play with us!' When I said, 'I never play! I can't play!' they swept about me and took me up, and made me light. Then it was all delicious ease and rest till they laid me down, and said all together, 'Have patience, and we will come again.' Whenever they came back, I used to know they were coming before I saw the long bright rows, by hearing them ask, all together, a long way off, 'Who is this in pain! Who is this in pain!' And I used to cry out, 'Oh, my blessed children, it's poor me. Have pity on me. Take me up and make me light.'" We confess to be unable to transcribe this without a suffusion in the eyes as we merely copy the passage; and with what sobbings, and blinding tears, must Dickens have written it! It is in unrhymed prose; but there are few more essentially poetic passages, compact of sensibility and imagination, in the verses of contemporary poets.

Take, again, a character of the extremely opposite kind, the resolute old maiden, Miss Potterson, who keeps the tavern of The Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, situated on the very edge of the Thames River, where such persons as Riderhood and the father of Lizzie Hexam are most inclined to congregate. The house is a drinking house; but she presides over it with an austerity, an autocracy, which would more properly become a secretary of a temperance society than a grim, good-hearted woman, who dispenses liquors of all kinds to the boatmen of the neighborhood. Mr. Evarts once said, in a humorous reference to the virtue of Vermont, that nobody could be admitted into its prisons without a certificate, testifying to his previous good moral character. Miss Potterson excludes, on the same principle, all tainted men from the privileges of her bar and parlor; and is specially careful in superintending and restricting the drinking of those gentlemen she allows to partake of her purl, flip, dog's-nose, and whatever other preparations of beer, sherry, or rum for which she has established a just reputation, admitted even by the police inspector, as an adept in concocting. There is something comical in the meek obedience of her customers to her will and judgment. "Captain

Joey," she says to one, "you have had as much as will do you good." The grog-drinkers tell him, "You be guided by Miss Abby, Captain." Then after he has toddled home, she suddenly darts down on another, who had warmly joined with those who were for banishing the captain from the convivial society. "Tom Tootle," she says, "it 's time for a young fellow who 's going to be married next month to be at home and asleep. And you need n't nudge him, Mr. Jack Mullins, for I know your work begins early to-morrow, and I say the same to you." Ruffians, like Riderhood, become tame and sycophantic at her frown; and a prominent element in the plot proceeds from his accusing the father of Lizzie Hexam of "a skill in purwiding what he finds," — that is, of killing the persons whose dead bodies he picks up in the river. The result of this cruel insinuation on the mind of Miss Potterson is, not to admit into the sanctuary of her bar, with the privilege of imbibing her liquors, the scoundrel she knows, but of banishing Gaffer Hexam from the select circle of her topers.

The satire of the novel gathers round the group assembled at the dinner table of Mr. Veneering. Neither he nor his wife seems qualified in any way to be connected with "society;" but the speculative merchant, sure in the end to be bankrupt, contrives to make himself eminently respectable by deceiving a positive representative of mercantile power, like Podsnap, to come to his dinners. Mrs. Podsnap goes because her attendance enables "elderly osteologists," or critics in the matter of bones, to observe and admire her meagre shoulders, while she leaves her daughter to the mercies of such creatures as the Lammles, eager to marry her to the lowest specimen of human vermin on which Dickens had heretofore exercised his satirical talent, namely, the mean, false, base, "nasty" Mr. Fledgeby. The fun of the thing consists in the fact, that people are not so much invited to dine at the Veneerings as that they invite each other to dine there, and despise and disregard the hosts whose rich viands they eat, and whose delicate wines they drink. They politely endure the existence of Mr. and Mrs. Veneering, at the head and foot of the table; but they act as

they would act at a tavern. They talk with each other, only acknowledging the giver of the feast by a few formal compliments. Lady Tippins is the person who lends dignity to the assemblage by her rank, while she is at the same time the most obviously foolish, chattering, impoverished, impertinent old dowager that could be selected from the pauper members of the nobility of Great Britain. Dickens's great point is, that the charming Tippins, with her parrot beak and parrot tongue, and others like her, give the tone to English middle-class "society," and interpose by their opinions a sort of aristocratic barrier to prevent any gentleman, like Eugene Wrayburn, to forfeit his caste by marrying below his rank. A full fourth of the book is devoted to a pitiless exposure of the false pretensions of what is called "society," and especially to a presentation of the unutterable unsatisfactoriness of the boredom, which obedience to the behests of "society" exacts.

We have said enough to show that in "Our Mutual Friend" the readers of Dickens had reason to congratulate themselves on a fresh and original exercise of his powers. But the circumstances under which much of it was written were very discouraging. He was repeatedly ill during its composition. In February, 1865, the complaint in his foot, which was the unheeded precursor of the disease of which he died, broke out, and deprived him, for the time, of his favorite method of disposing of all ills, moral and bodily, by long and rapid walks. At last he concluded to make a trip to France. "Work and worry," he wrote to Forster, "without exercise, would soon make an end of me. If I were not going away now, I should break down. No one knows as I know to-day, how near to it I have been." In returning from his French journey, he was on the train which met with the accident, commemorated in his postscript-preface to "Our Mutual Friend." On the 10th of June, 1865, he wrote to Forster: "I was in the terrific Staplehurst accident yesterday, and worked for hours among the dying and the dead. I was in the carriage that did not go over, but went off the line, and hung over the bridge in an inexplicable manner. No words

can describe the scene." Forster adds that Dickens never absolutely recovered from the nervous shock of that calamitous occurrence. "I am curiously weak," he wrote later in the month; "weak as if I were recovering from a long illness. . . . I begin to feel it more in my head. I sleep well and eat well; but I write half a dozen notes, and turn faint and sick. . . . I am getting right, though still low in pulse, and very nervous. Driving into Rochester yesterday, I felt more shaken than I have been since the accident." Indeed, considering all the circumstances which tended to interrupt his writing, while engaged on "Our Mutual Friend," it is curious that there are so few evidences of what was the fact, that many chapters were written "against the grain," and represented the forcing of his genius to do a work of which he tired before its completion.

A word should be said about the title of the novel, which occasioned much controversy during the period of its serial publication. Mr. Charles Folsom, the late accomplished librarian of the Boston Athenæum, a scholar under whose searching eye the manuscripts of some of the ablest historians and theologians of New England passed before they were committed to the press, and whose modest though valuable labors deserve a far higher acknowledgment and recognition than they have received, was especially distressed by the vulgarism of "Our Mutual Friend" being taken as a title by the most eminent of contemporary British romancers. After the first number of the book was issued, no man of letters could enter the library, without being accosted by Mr. Folsom, and implored to share his indignation at such an insult to the English language as Dickens had committed in substituting "mutual" for "common" friend. The grand old gentleman, with his genial rosy face, and the bright, earnest scholarly eyes blazing at you through his gold-rimmed spectacles, made you feel for the moment that all the treasures of wit, humor, fancy, sensibility, and characterization contained in the novel were incurably vitiated by the grammatical inaccuracy under which they were all included. But Dickens had chosen the title four years

before the first number was published, and adhered to it against all remonstrance and objection from English friends. He probably supposed that "Our Common Friend," however freed from the anathemas of grammarians, would not be so taking a title as the one he selected, open as it was to the obvious criticism of being a vulgarism of colloquial speech, unworthy of being chosen as the name of an extended work.

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

IN FOUR BOOKS

BOOK THE FIRST: THE CUP AND THE LIP

CHAPTER I

ON THE LOOK-OUT

In these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise, a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two figures in it, floated on the Thames, between Southwark Bridge, which is of iron, and London Bridge, which is of stone, as an autumn evening was closing in.

The figures in this boat were those of a strong man, with ragged, grizzled hair and a sun-browned face, and a dark girl of nineteen or twenty, sufficiently like him to be recognisable as his daughter. The girl rowed, pulling a pair of sculls very easily; the man, with the rudder-lines slack in his hands, and his hands loose in his waistband, kept an eager look-out. He had no net, hook, or line, and he could not be a fisherman; his boat had no cushion for a sitter, no paint, no inscription, no appliance beyond a rusty boat-hook and a coil of rope, and he could not be a waterman; his boat was too crazy and too small to take in cargo for delivery, and he could not be a lighterman or river-carrier; there was no clue to what he looked for, but he looked for something, with a most intent and searching gaze. The tide, which had turned an hour before, was running down, and his eyes watched every little race and eddy in its broad sweep, as the boat made slight headway against, or drove stern foremost before it, according as he directed his daughter by a movement of his head. She watched his face as earnestly as he watched the river. But in the intensity of her look there was a touch of dread or horror.

Allied to the bottom of the river rather than the surface, by reason of the slime and ooze with which it was covered, and its sodden state, this boat and the two figures in it obviously were doing something that they often did, and were seeking what they often sought. Half savage as the man showed, with no covering on his matted head, with his brown arms bare to between the elbow and the shoulder, with the loose knot of a looser kerchief lying low on his bare breast in a wilderness of beard and whisker, with such dress as he wore seeming to be made out of the mud that begrimed his boat, still there was business-like usage in his steady gaze. So with every lithe action of the girl, with every turn of her wrist, perhaps most of all with her look of dread or horror; they were things of usage.

"Keep her out, Lizzie. Tide runs strong here. Keep her well afore the sweep of it."

Trusting to the girl's skill and making no use of the rudder, he eyed the coming tide with an absorbed attention. So the girl eyed him. But it happened now that a slant of light from the setting sun glanced into the bottom of the boat, and, touching a rotten stain there which bore some resemblance to the outline of a muffled human form, coloured it as though with diluted blood. This caught the girl's eye, and she shivered.

"What ails you?" said the man, immediately aware of it, though so intent on the advancing waters; "I see nothing afloat."

The red light was gone, the shudder was gone, and his gaze, which had come back to the boat for a moment, travelled away again. Wheresoever the strong tide met with an impediment, his gaze paused for an instant. At every mooring-chain and rope, at every stationary boat or barge that split the current into a broad arrow-head, at the offsets from the piers of Southwark Bridge, at the paddles of the river steamboats as they beat the filthy water, at the floating logs of timber lashed together lying off certain wharves, his shining eyes darted a hungry look. After a darkening hour or so, suddenly the rudder-lines tightened in his hold, and he steered hard towards the Surrey shore.

Always watching his face, the girl instantly answered to the action in her sculling; presently the boat swung round, quivered as from a sudden jerk, and the upper half of the man was stretched out over the stern.

The girl pulled the hood of a cloak she wore over her head

and over her face, and, looking backward so that the front folds of this hood were turned down the river, kept the boat in that direction going before the tide. Until now, the boat had barely held her own, and had hovered about one spot; but now the banks changed swiftly, and the deepening shadows and the kindling lights of London Bridge were passed, and the tiers of shipping lay on either hand.

It was not until now that the upper half of the man came back into the boat. His arms were wet and dirty, and he washed them over the side. In his right hand he held something, and he washed that in the river too. It was money. He chinked it once, and he blew upon it once, and he spat upon it once, — "for luck," he hoarsely said, — before he put it in his pocket.

"Lizzie!"

The girl turned her face towards him with a start, and rowed in silence. Her face was very pale. He was a hook-nosed man, and with that and his bright eyes and his ruffled head bore a certain likeness to a roused bird of prey.

"Take that thing off your face."

She put it back.

"Here! and give me hold of the sculls. I 'll take the rest of the spell."

"No, no, father! No! I can't indeed. Father! — I cannot sit so near it!"

He was moving towards her to change places, but her terrified expostulation stopped him, and he resumed his seat.

"What hurt can it do you?"

"None, none. But I cannot bear it."

"It 's my belief you hate the sight of the very river."

"I — I do not like it, father."

"As if it was n't your living! As if it was n't meat and drink to you!"

At these latter words the girl shivered again, and for a moment paused in her rowing, seeming to turn deadly faint. It escaped his attention, for he was glancing over the stern at something the boat had in tow.

"How can you be so thankless to your best friend, Lizzie? The very fire that warmed you when you were a babby was picked out of the river alongside the coal barges. The very basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore. The very

rockers that I put it upon to make a cradle of it, I cut out of a piece of wood that drifted from some ship to another."

Lizzie took her right hand from the scull it held, and touched her lips with it, and for a moment held it out lovingly towards him; then, without speaking, she resumed her rowing, as another boat of similar appearance, though in rather better trim, came out from a dark place and dropped softly alongside.

"In luck again, Gaffer?" said a man with a squinting leer, who sculled her and who was alone. "I knowed you was in luck again, by your wake as you come down."

"Ah!" replied the other drily. "So you 're out, are you?"

"Yes, pardner."

There was now a tender yellow moonlight on the river, and the new-comer, keeping half his boat's length astern of the other boat, looked hard at its track.

"I says to myself," he went on, "directly you hove in view, Yonder 's Gaffer, and in luck again, by George if he ain't! Scull it is, pardner — don't fret yourself — I did n't touch him." This was an answer to a quick impatient movement on the part of Gaffer; the speaker at the same time unshipping his scull on that side, and laying his hand on the gunwale of Gaffer's boat and holding to it.

"He 's had touches enough not to want no more, as well as I make him out, Gaffer! Been a knocking about with a pretty many tides, ain't he, pardner? Such is my out-of-luck ways, you see! He must have passed me when he went up last time, for I was on the look-out below bridge here. I a'most think you 're like the wulturs, pardner, and scent 'em out."

He spoke in a dropped voice with more than one glance at Lizzie, who had pulled on her hood again. Both men then looked with a weird unholy interest at the wake of Gaffer's boat.

"Easy does it, betwixt us. Shall I take him aboard, pardner?"

"No," said the other. In so surly a tone that the man, after a blank stare, acknowledged it with the retort: —

"— Arn't been eating nothing as has disagreed with you, have you, pardner?"

"Why, yes, I have," said Gaffer. "I have been swallowing too much of that word, Pardner. I am no pardner of yours."

The Bird of Prey

"Since when was you no pardner of mine, Gaffer Hexam, Esquire?"

"Since you was accused of robbing a man. Accused of robbing a live man!" said Gaffer, with great indignation.

"And what if I had been accused of robbing a dead man, Gaffer?"

"You COULD N'T do it."

"Could n't you, Gaffer?"

"No. Has a dead man any use for money? Is it possible for a dead man to have money? What world does a dead man belong to? T' other world. What world does money belong to? This world. How can money be a corpse's? Can a corpse own it, want it, spend it, claim it, miss it? Don't try to go confounding the rights and wrongs of things in that way. But it 's worthy of the sneaking spirit that robs a live man."

"I will tell you what it is —"

"No you won't. *I*'ll tell you what it is. You 've got off with a short time of it for putting your hand in the pocket of a sailor, a live sailor. Make the most of it and think yourself lucky, but don't think after that to come over *me* with your pardners. We have worked together in time past, but we work together no more in time present nor yet future. Let go. Cast off!"

"Gaffer! If you think to get rid of me this way —"

"If I don't get rid of you this way, I'll try another, and chop you over the fingers with the stretcher, or take a pick at your head with the boat-hook. Cast off! Pull you, Lizzie. Pull home, since you won't let your father pull."

Lizzie shot ahead, and the other boat fell astern. Lizzie's father, composing himself into the easy attitude of one who had asserted the high moralities and taken an unassailable position, slowly lighted a pipe, and smoked, and took a survey of what he had in tow. What he had in tow lunged itself at him sometimes in an awful manner when the boat was checked, and sometimes seemed to try to wrench itself away, though for the most part it followed submissively. A neophyte might have fancied that the ripples passing over it were dreadfully like faint changes of expression on a sightless face; but Gaffer was no neophyte and had no fancies.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN FROM SOMEWHERE

Mr. and Mrs. Veneering were bran-new people in a bran-new house in a bran-new quarter of London. Everything about the Veneerings was spick and span new. All their furniture was new, all their friends were new, all their servants were new, their plate was new, their carriage was new, their harness was new, their horses were new, their pictures were new, they themselves were new, they were as newly married as was lawfully compatible with their having a bran-new baby, and if they had set up a great-grandfather, he would have come home in matting from the Pantechnicon, without a scratch upon him, French polished to the crown of his head.

For, in the Veneering establishment, from the hall-chairs with the new coat of arms to the grand pianoforte with the new action, and up stairs again to the new fire-escape, all things were in a state of high varnish and polish. And what was observable in the furniture was observable in the Veneerings — the surface smelt a little too much of the work-shop and was a trifle sticky.

There was an innocent piece of dinner furniture that went upon easy castors and was kept over a livery stable-yard in Duke Street, St. James's, when not in use, to whom the Veneerings were a source of blind confusion. The name of this article was Twemlow. Being first cousin to Lord Snigsworth, he was in frequent requisition, and at many houses might be said to represent the dining-table in its normal state. Mr. and Mrs. Veneering, for example, arranging a dinner, habitually started with Twemlow, and then put leaves in him, or added guests to him. Sometimes, the table consisted of Twemlow and half a dozen leaves; sometimes of Twemlow and a dozen leaves; sometimes, Twemlow was pulled out to his utmost extent of twenty leaves. Mr. and Mrs. Veneering on occasions of ceremony faced each other in the centre of the board, and thus the

parallel still held; for it always happened that the more Twemlow was pulled out, the farther he found himself from the centre, and the nearer to the sideboard at one end of the room, or the window-curtains at the other.

But it was not this which steeped the feeble soul of Twemlow in confusion. This he was used to, and could take soundings of. The abyss to which he could find no bottom, and from which started forth the engrossing and ever-swelling difficulty of his life, was the insoluble question whether he was Veneering's oldest friend, or newest friend. To the excogitation of this problem, the harmless gentleman had devoted many anxious hours, both in his lodgings over the livery stable-yard, and in the cold gloom, favourable to meditation, of St. James's Square. Thus. Twemlow had first known Veneering at his club, where Veneering then knew nobody but the man who made them known to one another, who seemed to be the most intimate friend he had in the world, and whom he had known two days — the bond of union between their souls, the nefarious conduct of the committee respecting the cookery of a fillet of veal, having been accidentally cemented at that date. Immediately upon this, Twemlow received an invitation to dine with Veneering, and dined: the man being of the party. Immediately upon that, Twemlow received an invitation to dine with the man, and dined: Veneering being of the party. At the man's were a Member, an Engineer, a Payer-off of the National Debt, a Poem on Shakespeare, a Grievance, and a Public Office, who all seemed to be utter strangers to Veneering. And yet immediately after that, Twemlow received an invitation to dine at Veneering's, expressly to meet the Member, the Engineer, the Payer-off of the National Debt, the Poem on Shakespeare, the Grievance, and the Public Office, and, dining, discovered that all of them were the most intimate friends Veneering had in the world, and that the wives of all of them (who were all there) were the objects of Mrs. Veneering's most devoted affection and tender confidence.

Thus it had come about, that Mr. Twemlow had said to himself in his lodgings, with his hand to his forehead: "I must not think of this. This is enough to soften any man's brain," — and yet was always thinking of it, and could never form a conclusion.

This evening the Veneerings give a banquet. Eleven leaves

in the Twemlow; fourteen in company all told. Four pigeon-breasted retainers in plain clothes stand in line in hall. A fifth retainer, proceeding up the staircase with a mournful air — as who should say, "Here is another wretched creature come to dinner; such is life!" — announces, "Mister Twemlow!"

Mrs. Veneering welcomes her sweet Mr. Twemlow. Mr. Veneering welcomes his dear Twemlow. Mrs. Veneering does not expect that Mr. Twemlow can in nature care much for such insipid things as babies, but so old a friend must please to look at baby. "Ah! You will know the friend of your family better, Tootleums," says Mr. Veneering, nodding emotionally at that new article, "when you begin to take notice." He then begs to make his dear Twemlow known to his two friends, Mr. Boots and Mr. Brewer — and clearly has no distinct idea which is which.

But now a fearful circumstance occurs.

"Mis-ter and Mis-sis Podsnap!"

"My dear," says Mr. Veneering to Mrs. Veneering, with an air of much friendly interest, while the door stands open, "the Podsnaps."

A too, too smiling large man, with a fatal freshness on him, appearing with his wife, instantly deserts his wife and darts at Twemlow with: —

"How do you do? So glad to know you. Charming house you have here. I hope we are not late. So glad of this opportunity, I am sure!"

When the first shock fell upon him, Twemlow twice skipped back in his neat little shoes and his neat little silk stockings of a bygone fashion, as if impelled to leap over a sofa behind him; but the large man closed with him and proved too strong.

"Let me," says the large man, trying to attract the attention of his wife in the distance, "have the pleasure of presenting Mrs. Podsnap to her host. She will be," in his fatal freshness he seems to find perpetual verdure and eternal youth in the phrase, "she will be so glad of the opportunity, I am sure!"

In the mean time, Mrs. Podsnap, unable to originate a mistake on her own account, because Mrs. Veneering is the only other lady there, does her best in the way of handsomely supporting her husband's, by looking towards Mr. Twemlow with a plaintive countenance and remarking to Mrs. Veneering in a feeling manner, firstly, that she fears he has been rather bilious of late, and, secondly, that the baby is already very like him.

It is questionable whether any man quite relishes being mistaken for any other man; but Mr. Veneering, having this very evening set up the shirt-front of the young Antinous (in new worked cambric just come home), is not at all complimented by being supposed to be Twemlow, who is dry and weazen and some thirty years older. Mrs. Veneering equally resents the imputation of being the wife of Twemlow. As to Twemlow, he is so sensible of being a much better bred man than Veneering, that he considers the large man an offensive ass.

In this complicated dilemma, Mr. Veneering approaches the large man with extended hand, and smilingly assures that incorrigible personage that he is delighted to see him: who in his fatal freshness instantly replies: —

"Thank you. I am ashamed to say that I cannot at this moment recall where we met, but I am so glad of this opportunity, I am sure!"

Then pouncing upon Twemlow, who holds back with all his feeble might, he is haling him off to present him, as Veneering, to Mrs. Podsnap, when the arrival of more guests unravels the mistake. Whereupon, having re-shaken hands with Veneering as Veneering, he re-shakes hands with Twemlow as Twemlow, and winds it all up to his own perfect satisfaction by saying to the last-named, "Ridiculous opportunity — but so glad of it, I am sure!"

Now, Twemlow having undergone this terrific experience, having likewise noted the fusion of Boots in Brewer and Brewer in Boots, and having further observed that of the remaining seven guests four discreet characters enter with wandering eyes and wholly decline to commit themselves as to which is Veneering, until Veneering has them in his grasp, — Twemlow, having profited by these studies, finds his brain wholesomely hardening as he approaches the conclusion that he really is Veneering's oldest friend, when his brain softens again and all is lost, through his eyes encountering Veneering and the large man linked together as twin brothers in the back drawing-room near the conservatory door, and through his ears informing him in the tones of Mrs. Veneering that the same large man is to be baby's godfather.

"Dinner is on the table!"

Thus the melancholy retainer, as who should say, "Come down and be poisoned, ye unhappy children of men!"

Twemlow, having no lady assigned to him, goes down in the rear, with his hand to his forehead. Boots and Brewer, thinking him indisposed, whisper, "Man faint. Had no lunch." But he is only stunned by the unvanquishable difficulty of his existence.

Revived by soup, Twemlow discourses mildly of the Court Circular with Boots and Brewer. Is appealed to, at the fish stage of the banquet, by Veneering, on the disputed question whether his cousin Lord Snigsworth is in or out of town. Gives it that his cousin is out of town. "At Snigsworthy Park?" Veneering inquires. "At Snigsworthy," Twemlow rejoins. Boots and Brewer regard this as a man to be cultivated; and Veneering is clear that he is a remunerative article. Meantime the retainer goes round, like a gloomy Analytical Chemist: always seeming to say, after "Chablis, sir?" — "You would n't if you knew what it 's made of."

The great looking-glass above the sideboard reflects the table and the company. Reflects the new Veneering crest, in gold and eke in silver, frosted and also thawed, a camel of all work. The Heralds' College found out a Crusading ancestor for Veneering who bore a camel on his shield (or might have done it if he had thought of it), and a caravan of camels take charge of the fruits and flowers and candles, and kneel down to be loaded with the salt. Reflects Veneering; forty, wavy-haired, dark, tending to corpulence, sly, mysterious, filmy — a kind of sufficiently well-looking veiled-prophet, not prophesying. Reflects Mrs. Veneering; fair, aquiline-nosed and fingered, not so much light hair as she might have, gorgeous in raiment and jewels, enthusiastic, propitiatory, conscious that a corner of her husband's veil is over herself. Reflects Podsnap; prosperously feeding, two little light-coloured wiry wings, one on either side of his else bald head, looking as like his hairbrushes as his hair, dissolving view of red beads on his forehead, large allowance of crumpled shirt-collar up behind. Reflects Mrs. Podsnap; fine woman for Professor Owen, quantity of bone, neck and nostrils like a rocking-horse, hard features, majestic head-dress in which Podsnap has hung golden offerings. Reflects Twemlow; grey, dry, polite, susceptible to east wind, First-Gentleman-in-Europe collar and cravat, cheeks drawn in as if he had made a great effort to retire into himself some years ago, and had got so far and had never got any farther. Reflects mature young lady; raven locks, and complexion that lights up well when well pow-

dered — as it is — carrying on considerably in the captivation of mature young gentleman; with too much nose in his face, too much ginger in his whiskers, too much torso in his waistcoat, too much sparkle in his studs, his eyes, his buttons, his talk, and his teeth. Reflects charming old Lady Tippins on Veneering's right; with an immense, obtuse, drab, oblong face, like a face in a tablespoon, and a dyed Long Walk up the top of her head, as a convenient public approach to the bunch of false hair behind, pleased to patronise Mrs. Veneering opposite, who is pleased to be patronised. Reflects a certain "Mortimer," another of Veneering's oldest friends; who never was in the house before, and appears not to want to come again, who sits disconsolate on Mrs. Veneering's left, and who was inveigled by Lady Tippins (a friend of his boyhood) to come to these people's and talk, and who won't talk. Reflects Eugene, friend of Mortimer; buried alive in the back of his chair, behind a shoulder — with a powder-epaulette on it — of the mature young lady, and gloomily resorting to the champagne chalice whenever proffered by the Analytical Chemist. Lastly, the looking-glass reflects Boots and Brewer, and two other stuffed Buffers interposed between the rest of the company and possible accidents.

The Veneering dinners are excellent dinners — or new people would n't come — and all goes well. Notably, Lady Tippins has made a series of experiments on her digestive functions, so extremely complicated and daring, that if they could be published with their results it might benefit the human race. Having taken in provisions from all parts of the world, this hardy old cruiser has last touched at the North Pole, when, as the ice-plates are being removed, the following words fall from her: —

"I assure you, my dear Veneering — "

(Poor Twemlow's hand approaches his forehead, for it would seem now, that Lady Tippins is going to be the oldest friend.)

"I assure you, my dear Veneering, that it is the oddest affair! Like the advertising people, I don't ask you to trust me without offering a respectable reference. Mortimer there is my reference, and knows all about it."

Mortimer raises his drooping eyelids, and slightly opens his mouth. But a faint smile, expressive of "What 's the use!" passes over his face, and he drops his eyelids and shuts his mouth.

"Now, Mortimer," says Lady Tippins, rapping the sticks of her closed green fan upon the knuckles of her left hand — which is particularly rich in knuckles, "I insist upon your telling all that is to be told about the man from Jamaica."

"Give you my honour I never heard of any man from Jamaica, except the man who was a brother," replies Mortimer.

"Tobago, then."

"Nor yet from Tobago."

"Except," Eugene strikes in: so unexpectedly that the mature young lady, who has forgotten all about him, with a start takes the epaulette out of his way: "except our friend who long lived on rice-pudding and isinglass, till at length to his something or other, his physician said something else, and a leg of mutton somehow ended in daygo."

A reviving impression goes round the table that Eugene is coming out. An unfulfilled impression, for he goes in again.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Veneering," quoth Lady Tippins, "I appeal to you whether this is not the basest conduct ever known in this world? I carry my lovers about, two or three at a time, on condition that they are very obedient and devoted; and here is my old lover-in-chief, the head of all my slaves, throwing off his allegiance before company! And here is another of my lovers, a rough Cymon at present certainly, but of whom I had most hopeful expectations as to his turning out well in course of time, pretending that he can't remember his nursery rhymes! On purpose to annoy me, for he knows how I dote upon them!"

A grisly little fiction concerning her lovers is Lady Tippins's point. She is always attended by a lover or two, and she keeps a little list of her lovers, and she is always booking a new lover, or striking out an old lover, or putting a lover in her black list, or promoting a lover to her blue list, or adding up her lovers, or otherwise posting her book. Mrs. Veneering is charmed by her humour, and so is Veneering. Perhaps it is enhanced by a certain yellow play in Lady Tippins's throat, like the legs of scratching poultry.

"I banish the false wretch from this moment, and I strike him out of my Cupidon (my name for my Ledger, my dear,) this very night. But I am resolved to have the account of the man from Somewhere, and I beg you to elicit it for me, my love," to Mrs. Veneering, "as I have lost my own influence.

Oh, you perjured man!" This to Mortimer, with a rattle of her fan.

"We are all very much interested in the man from Somewhere," Veneering observes.

Then the four Buffers, taking heart of grace all four at once, say: —

"Deeply interested!"
"Quite excited!"
"Dramatic!"
"Man from Nowhere, perhaps!"

And then Mrs. Veneering — for Lady Tippins's winning wiles are contagious — folds her hands in the manner of a supplicating child, turns to her left neighbour, and says, "Tease! Pay! Man from Tumwhere!" At which the four Buffers, again mysteriously moved all four at once, exclaim, "You can't resist!"

"Upon my life," says Mortimer languidly, "I find it immensely embarrassing to have the eyes of Europe upon me to this extent, and my only consolation is that you will all of you execrate Lady Tippins in your secret hearts when you find, as you inevitably will, the man from Somewhere a bore. Sorry to destroy romance by fixing him with a local habitation, but he comes from the place, the name of which escapes me, but will suggest itself to everybody else here, where they make the wine."

Eugene suggests "Day and Martin's."

"No, not that place," returns the unmoved Mortimer, "that 's where they make the Port. My man comes from the country where they make the Cape Wine. But look here, old fellow; it 's not at all statistical and it 's rather odd."

It is always noticeable at the table of the Veneerings, that no man troubles himself much about the Veneerings themselves, and that any one who has anything to tell, generally tells it to anybody else in preference.

"The man," Mortimer goes on, addressing Eugene, "whose name is Harmon, was only son of a tremendous old rascal who made his money by Dust."

"Red velveteens and a bell?" the gloomy Eugene inquires.

"And a ladder and basket if you like. By which means, or by others, he grew rich as a Dust Contractor, and lived in a hollow in a hilly country entirely composed of Dust. On his

own small estate the growling old vagabond threw up his own mountain range, like an old volcano, and its geological formation was Dust. Coal-dust, vegetable-dust, bone-dust, crockery-dust, rough dust and sifted dust, — all manner of Dust."

A passing remembrance of Mrs. Veneering here induces Mortimer to address his next half-dozen words to her; after which he wanders away again, tries Twemlow and finds he doesn't answer, ultimately takes up with the Buffers who receive him enthusiastically.

"The moral being — I believe that's the right expression — of this exemplary person derived its highest gratification from anathematising his nearest relations and turning them out of doors. Having begun (as was natural) by rendering these attentions to the wife of his bosom, he next found himself at leisure to bestow a similar recognition on the claims of his daughter. He chose a husband for her entirely to his own satisfaction and not in the least to hers, and proceeded to settle upon her, as her marriage portion, I don't know how much Dust, but something immense. At this stage of the affair the poor girl respectfully intimated that she was secretly engaged to that popular character whom the novelists and versifiers call Another, and that such a marriage would make Dust of her heart and Dust of her life — in short, would set her up, on a very extensive scale, in her father's business. Immediately, the venerable parent — on a cold winter's night, it is said — anathematised and turned her out."

Here, the Analytical Chemist (who has evidently formed a very low opinion of Mortimer's story) concedes a little claret to the Buffers; who, again mysteriously moved all four at once, screw it slowly into themselves with a peculiar twist of enjoyment, as they cry in chorus, "Pray go on."

"The pecuniary resources of Another were, as they usually are, of a very limited nature. I believe I am not using too strong an expression when I say that Another was hard up. However, he married the young lady, and they lived in a humble dwelling, probably possessing a porch ornamented with honeysuckle and woodbine twining, until she died. I must refer you to the Registrar of the District in which the humble dwelling was situated, for the certified cause of death; but early sorrow and anxiety may have had to do with it, though they may not appear in the ruled pages and printed forms. Indisputably this

was the case with Another, for he was so cut up by the loss of his young wife that if he outlived her a year it was as much as he did."

There is that in the indolent Mortimer which seems to hint that if good society might on any account allow itself to be impressible, he, one of good society, might have the weakness to be impressed by what he here relates. It is hidden with great pains, but it is in him. The gloomy Eugene, too, is not without some kindred touch; for when that appalling Lady Tippins declares that if Another had survived, he should have gone down at the head of her list of lovers, — and also when the mature young lady shrugs her epaulettes and laughs at some private and confidential comment from the mature young gentleman, — his gloom deepens to that degree that he trifles quite ferociously with his dessert-knife.

Mortimer proceeds.

"We must now return, as the novelists say, and as we all wish they would n't, to the man from Somewhere. Being a boy of fourteen, cheaply educating at Brussels when his sister's expulsion befell, it was some little time before he heard of it — probably from herself, for the mother was dead; but that I don't know. Instantly, he absconded, and came over here. He must have been a boy of spirit and resource, to get here on a stopped allowance of five sous a week; but he did it somehow, and he burst in on his father, and pleaded his sister's cause. Venerable parent promptly resorts to anathematisation, and turns him out. Shocked and terrified boy takes flight, seeks his fortune, gets aboard ship, ultimately turns up on dry land among the Cape Wine: small proprietor, farmer, grower — whatever you like to call it."

At this juncture, shuffling is heard in the hall, and tapping is heard at the dining-room door. Analytical Chemist goes to the door, confers angrily with unseen tapper, appears to become mollified by descrying reason in the tapping, and goes out.

"So he was discovered, only the other day, after having been expatriated about fourteen years."

A Buffer, suddenly astounding the other three, by detaching himself, and asserting individuality, inquires, "How discovered, and why?"

"Ah! To be sure. Thank you for reminding me. Venerable parent dies."

Same Buffer, emboldened by success, says, "When?"

"The other day. Ten or twelve months ago."

Same Buffer inquires with smartness, "What of?" But herein perishes a melancholy example; being regarded by the three other Buffers with a stony stare, and attracting no further attention from any mortal.

"Venerable parent," Mortimer repeats with a passing remembrance that there is a Veneering at table, and for the first time addressing him — "dies."

The gratified Veneering repeats, gravely, "dies;" and folds his arms, and composes his brow to hear it out in a judicial manner, when he finds himself again deserted in the bleak world.

"His will is found," says Mortimer, catching Mrs. Podsnap's rocking-horse's eye. "It is dated very soon after the son's flight. It leaves the lowest of the range of dust-mountains, with some sort of a dwelling-house at its foot, to an old servant who is sole executor, and all the rest of the property — which is very considerable — to the son. He directs himself to be buried with certain eccentric ceremonies and precautions against his coming to life, with which I need not bore you, and that's all — except" — and this ends the story.

The Analytical Chemist returning, everybody looks at him. Not because anybody wants to see him, but because of that subtle influence in nature which impels humanity to embrace the slightest opportunity of looking at anything, rather than the person who addresses it.

"— Except that the son's inheriting is made conditional on his marrying a girl, who at the date of the will was a child of four or five years old, and who is now a marriageable young woman. Advertisement and inquiry discovered the son in the man from Somewhere, and at the present moment he is on his way home from there — no doubt, in a state of great astonishment — to succeed to a very large fortune, and to take a wife."

Mrs. Podsnap inquires whether the young person is a young person of personal charms? Mortimer is unable to report.

Mr. Podsnap inquires what would become of the very large fortune, in the event of the marriage condition not being fulfilled? Mortimer replies, that by special testamentary clause it would then go to the old servant above mentioned, passing over and excluding the son; also, that if the son had not been

living, the same old servant would have been sole residuary legatee.

Mrs. Veneering has just succeeded in waking Lady Tippins from a snore, by dexterously shunting a train of plates and dishes at her knuckles across the table; when everybody but Mortimer himself becomes aware that the Analytical Chemist is, in a ghostly manner, offering him a folded paper. Curiosity detains Mrs. Veneering a few moments.

Mortimer, in spite of all the arts of the chemist, placidly refreshes himself with a glass of Maderia, and remains unconscious of the document which engrosses the general attention, until Lady Tippins (who has a habit of waking totally insensible), having remembered where she is, and recovered a perception of surrounding objects, says: "Falser man than Don Juan; why don't you take the note from the Commendatore?" Upon which, the chemist advances it under the nose of Mortimer, who looks round at him, and says: —

"What 's this?"

Analytical Chemist bends and whispers.

"*Who?*" says Mortimer.

Analytical Chemist again bends and whispers.

Mortimer stares at him, and unfolds the paper. Reads it, reads it twice, turns it over to look at the blank outside, reads it a third time.

"This arrives in an extraordinary opportune manner," says Mortimer then, looking with an altered face round the table: "this is the conclusion of the story of the identical man."

"Already married?" one guesses.

"Declines to marry?" another guesses.

"Codicil among the dust?" another guesses.

"Why, no," says Mortimer; "remarkable thing, you are all wrong. The story is completer and rather more exciting than I supposed. Man 's drowned!"

CHAPTER III

ANOTHER MAN

As the disappearing skirts of the ladies ascended the Veneering staircase, Mortimer, following them forth from the dining-room, turned into a library of bran-new books, in bran-new bindings liberally gilded, and requested to see the messenger who had brought the paper. He was a boy of about fifteen. Mortimer looked at the boy, and the boy looked at the bran-new pilgrims on the wall, going to Canterbury in more gold frame than procession, and more carving than country.

"Whose writing is this?"

"Mine, sir."

"Who told you to write it?"

"My father, Jesse Hexam."

"Is it he who found the body?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your father?"

The boy hesitated, looked reproachfully at the pilgrims as if they had involved him in a little difficulty, then said, folding a plait in the right leg of his trousers, "He gets his living alongshore."

"Is it far?"

"Is which far?" asked the boy, upon his guard, and again upon the road to Canterbury.

"To your father's."

"It's a goodish stretch, sir. I come up in a cab, and the cab's waiting to be paid. We could go back in it before you paid it, if you liked. I went first to your office, according to the direction of the papers found in the pockets, and there I see nobody but a chap of about my age, who sent me on here."

There was a curious mixture in the boy of uncompleted savagery and uncompleted civilisation. His voice was hoarse and coarse, and his face was coarse, and his stunted figure was coarse; but he was cleaner than other boys of his type; and his

writing, though large and round, was good; and he glanced at the backs of the books with an awakened curiosity that went below the binding. No one who can read ever looks at a book, even unopened on a shelf, like one who cannot.

"Were any means taken, do you know, boy, to ascertain if it was possible to restore life?" Mortimer inquired, as he sought for his hat.

"You would n't ask, sir, if you knew his state. Pharaoh's multitude that were drowned in the Red Sea ain't more beyond restoring to life. If Lazarus was only half as far gone, that was the greatest of all the miracles."

"Halloa!" cried Mortimer, turning round with his hat upon his head, "you seem to be at home in the Red Sea, my young friend."

"Read of it with teacher at the school," said the boy.

"And Lazarus?"

"Yes, and him too. But don't you tell my father! We should have no peace in our place, if that got touched upon. It 's my sister's contriving."

"You seem to have a good sister."

"She ain't half bad," said the boy; "but if she knows her letters it 's the most she does — and them I learned her."

The gloomy Eugene, with his hands in his pockets, had strolled in and assisted at the latter part of the dialogue; when the boy spoke these words slightingly of his sister, he took him roughly enough by the chin, and turned up his face to look at it.

"Well, I 'm sure, sir!" said the boy, resisting; "I hope you 'll know me again."

Eugene vouchsafed no answer, but made the proposal to Mortimer, "I 'll go with you, if you like." So they all three went away together in the vehicle that had brought the boy; the two friends (once boys together at a public school) inside, smoking cigars; the messenger on the box beside the driver.

"Let me see," said Mortimer, as they went along; "I have been, Eugene, upon the honourable roll of solicitors of the High Court of Chancery, and attorneys at Common Law, five years; and — except gratuitously taking instructions, on an average once a fortnight, for the will of Lady Tippins, who has nothing to leave — I have had no scrap of business but this romantic business."

"And I," said Eugene, "have been 'called' seven years, and have had no business at all, and never shall have any. And if I had, I should n't know how to do it."

"I am far from being clear as to the last particular," returned Mortimer, with great composure, "that I have much advantage over you."

"I hate," said Eugene, putting his legs up on the opposite seat, — "I hate my profession."

"Shall I incommode you if I put mine up too?" returned Mortimer. "Thank you. I hate mine."

"It was forced upon me," said the gloomy Eugene, "because it was understood that we wanted a barrister in the family. We have got a precious one."

"It was forced upon me," said Mortimer, "because it was understood that we wanted a solicitor in the family. And we have got a precious one."

"There are four of us, with our names painted on a door-post in right of one black hole called a set of chambers," said Eugene; "and each of us has the fourth of a clerk — Cassim Baba, in the robber's cave — and Cassim is the only respectable member of the party."

"I am one by myself, one," said Mortimer, "high up an awful staircase commanding a burial-ground, and I have a whole clerk to myself, and he has nothing to do but look at the burial-ground, and what he will turn out when arrived at maturity, I cannot conceive. Whether, in that shabby rook's nest, he is always plotting wisdom, or plotting murder; whether he will grow up, after so much solitary brooding, to enlighten his fellow-creatures, or to poison them, is the only speck of interest that presents itself to my professional view. Will you give me a light? Thank you."

"Then idiots talk," said Eugene, leaning back, folding his arms, smoking with his eyes shut, and speaking slightly through his nose, "of Energy. If there is a word in the dictionary under any letter from A to Z that I abominate, it is energy. It is such a conventional superstition, such parrot gabble! What the deuce! Am I to rush out into the street, collar the first man of a wealthy appearance that I meet, shake him, and say, 'Go to law upon the spot, you dog, and retain me, or I'll be the death of you?' Yet that would be energy."

"Precisely my view of the case, Eugene. But show me a

good opportunity, show me something really worth being energetic about, and *I*'ll show you energy."

"And so will I," said Eugene.

And it is likely enough that ten thousand other young men, within the limits of the London post-office town delivery, made the same hopeful remark in the course of the same evening.

The wheels rolled on, and rolled down by the Monument and by the Tower, and by the Docks; down by Ratcliffe, and by Rotherhithe; down by where accumulated scum of humanity seemed to be washed from higher grounds, like so much moral sewage, and to be pausing until its own weight forced it over the bank and sunk it in the river. In and out among vessels that seemed to have got ashore, and houses that seemed to have got afloat — among bowsprits staring into windows, and windows staring into ships — the wheels rolled on, until they stopped at a dark corner, river-washed and otherwise not washed at all, where the boy alighted and opened the door.

"You must walk the rest, sir; it's not many yards." He spoke in the singular number, to the express exclusion of Eugene.

"This is a confoundedly out-of-the-way place," said Mortimer, slipping over the stones and refuse on the shore, as the boy turned the corner sharp.

"Here 's my father's, sir; where the light is."

The low building had the look of having once been a mill. There was a rotten wart of wood upon its forehead that seemed to indicate where the sails had been, but the whole was very indistinctly seen in the obscurity of the night. The boy lifted the latch of the door, and they passed at once into a low circular room, where a man stood before a red fire, looking down into it, and a girl sat engaged in needle-work. The fire was in a rusty brazier, not fitted to the hearth; and a common lamp, shaped like a hyacinth-root, smoked and flared in the neck of a stone bottle on the table. There was a wooden bunk or berth in a corner, and in another corner a wooden stair leading above — so clumsy and steep that it was little better than a ladder. Two or three old sculls and oars stood against the wall, and against another part of the wall was a small dresser, making a spare show of the commonest articles of crockery and cooking-vessels. The roof of the room was not plastered, but was formed of the flooring of the room above. This, being very

old, knotted, seamed, and beamed, gave a lowering aspect to the chamber; and roof, and walls, and floor, alike abounding in old smears of flour, red-lead (or some such stain which it had probably acquired in warehousing), and damp, alike had a look of decomposition.

"The gentleman, father."

The figure at the red fire turned, raised its ruffled head, and looked like a bird of prey.

"You 're Mortimer Lightwood, Esquire; are you, sir?"

"Mortimer Lightwood is my name. What you found," said Mortimer, glancing rather shrinkingly towards the bunk; "is it here?"

"'T ain't not to say here, but it 's close by. I do everything reg'lar. I 've giv' notice of the circumstarnce to the police, and the police have took possession of it. No time ain't been lost, on any hand. The police have put it into print already, and here 's what the print says of it."

Taking up the bottle with the lamp in it, he held it near a paper on the wall, with the police heading, BODY FOUND. The two friends read the handbill as it stuck against the wall, and Gaffer read them as he held the light.

"Only papers on the unfortunate man, I see," said Lightwood, glancing from the description of what was found to the finder.

"Only papers."

Here the girl arose with her work in her hand, and went out at the door.

"No money," pursued Mortimer, "but threepence in one of the skirt-pockets."

"Three. Penny. Pieces," said Gaffer Hexam, in as many sentences.

"The trousers pockets empty, and turned inside out."

Gaffer Hexam nodded. "But that 's common. Whether it 's the wash of the tide or no, I can't say. Now, here," moving the light to another similar placard, "*his* pockets was found empty, and turned inside out. And here," moving the light to another, "*her* pocket was found empty, and turned inside out. And so was this one's. And so was that one's. I can't read, nor I don't want to it, for I know 'em by their places on the wall. This one was a sailor, with two anchors and a flag and G. F. T. on his arm. Look and see if he warn't."

"Quite right."

"This one was the young woman in grey boots, and her linen marked with a cross. Look and see if she warn't."

"Quite right."

"This is him as had a nasty cut over the eye. This is them two young sisters what tied themselves together with a handkercher. This is the drunken old chap, in a pair of list slippers and a nightcap, wot had offered — it afterwards come out — to make a hole in the water for a quartern of rum stood aforehand, and kept to his word for the first and last time in his life. They pretty well papers the room, you see; but I know 'em all. I'm scholar enough!"

He waved the light over the whole, as if to typify the light of his scholarly intelligence, and then put it down on the table and stood behind it looking intently at his visitors. He had the special peculiarity of some birds of prey, that when he knitted his brow, his ruffled crest stood highest.

"You did not find all these yourself, did you?" asked Eugene.

To which the bird of prey slowly rejoined, "And what might *your* name be, now?"

"This is my friend," Mortimer Lightwood interposed, "Mr. Eugene Wrayburn."

"Mr. Eugene Wrayburn, is it? And what might Mr. Eugene Wrayburn have asked of me?"

"I asked you, simply, if you found all these yourself?"

"I answer you, simply, most on 'em."

"Do you suppose there has been much violence and robbery, beforehand, among these cases?"

"I don't suppose at all about it," returned Gaffer. "I ain't one of the supposing sort. If you 'd got your living to haul out of the river every day of your life, you might n't be much given to supposing. Am I to show the way?"

As he opened the door, in pursuance of a nod from Lightwood, an extremely pale and disturbed face appeared in the doorway — the face of a man much agitated.

"A body missing?" asked Gaffer Hexam, stopping short; "or a body found? Which?"

"I am lost!" replied the man, in a hurried and an eager manner.

"Lost?"

"I — I — am a stranger, and don't know the way. I — I

want to find the place where I can see what is described here. It is possible I may know it." He was panting, and could hardly speak; but he showed a copy of the newly printed bill that was still wet upon the wall. Perhaps its newness, or perhaps the accuracy of his observations of its general look, guided Gaffer to a ready conclusion.

"This gentleman, Mr. Lightwood, is on that business."

"Mr. Lightwood?"

During a pause, Mortimer and the stranger confronted each other. Neither knew the other.

"I think, sir," said Mortimer, breaking the awkward silence with his airy self-possession, "that you did me the honour to mention my name?"

"I repeated it, after this man."

"You said you were a stranger in London?"

"An utter stranger."

"Are you seeking a Mr. Harmon?"

"No."

"Then I believe I can assure you that you are on a fruitless errand and will not find what you fear to find. Will you come with us?"

A little winding through some muddy alleys that might have been deposited by the last ill-savoured tide brought them to the wicket gate and bright lamp of a Police Station; where they found the Night-Inspector, with a pen and ink and ruler, posting up his books in a whitewashed office, as studiously as if it were in a monastery on the top of a mountain, and no howling fury of a drunken woman were banging herself against a cell-door in the back yard at his elbow. With the same air of a recluse much given to study, he desisted from his books to bestow a distrustful nod of recognition upon Gaffer, plainly importing, "Ah! we know all about *you*, and you'll overdo it some day;" and to inform Mr. Mortimer Lightwood and friends that he would attend them immediately. Then he finished ruling the work he had in his hand (it might have been illuminating a missal, he was so calm), in a very neat and methodical manner, showing not the slightest consciousness of the woman who was banging herself with increased violence, and shrieking most terrifically for some other woman's liver.

"A bull's-eye," said the Night-Inspector, taking up his keys. Which a deferential satellite produced. "Now, gentlemen."

With one of his keys, he opened a cool grot at the end of the yard, and they all went in. They quickly came out again, no one speaking but Eugene: who remarked to Mortimer, in a whisper, "Not *much* worse than Lady Tippins."

So, back to the whitewashed library of the monastery — with that liver still in shrieking requisition, as it had been loudly, while they looked at the silent sight they came to see — and there through the merits of the case as summed up by the Abbot. No clue to how body came into river. Very often was no clue. Too late to know for certain whether injuries received before or after death; one excellent surgical opinion said, before; other excellent surgical opinion said, after. Steward of ship, in which gentleman came home passenger, had been round to view, and could swear to identity. Likewise could swear to clothes. And then, you see, you had the papers, too. How was it he had totally disappeared on leaving ship, till found in river? Well! Probably had been upon some little game. Probably thought it a harmless game, was n't up to things, and it turned out a fatal game. Inquest to-morrow, and no doubt open verdict.

"It appears to have knocked your friend over — knocked him completely off his legs," Mr. Inspector remarked, when he had finished his summing up. "It has given him a bad turn, to be sure!" This was said in a very low voice, and with a searching look (not the first he had cast) at the stranger.

Mr. Lightwood explained that it was no friend of his.

"Indeed?" said Mr. Inspector, with an attentive ear; "where did you pick him up?"

Mr. Lightwood explained further.

Mr. Inspector had delivered his summing up, and had added these words, with his elbows leaning on his desk, and the fingers and thumb of his right hand fitting themselves to the fingers and thumb of his left. Mr. Inspector moved nothing but his eyes, as he now added, raising his voice: —

"Turned you faint, sir! Seems you 're not accustomed to this kind of work?"

The stranger, who was leaning against the chimney-piece with drooping head, looked round and answered, "No. It 's a horrible sight!"

"You expected to identify, I am told, sir?"

"Yes."

"*Have* you identified?"

"No. It's a horrible sight. Oh! a horrible, horrible sight!"

"Who did you think it might have been?" asked Mr. Inspector. "Give us a description, sir. Perhaps we can help you."

"No, no," said the stranger; "it would be quite useless. Good night."

Mr. Inspector had not moved, and had given no order; but the satellite slipped his back against the wicket, and laid his left arm along the top of it, and with his right hand turned the bull's-eye he had taken from his chief — in quite a casual manner — towards the stranger.

"You missed a friend, you know; or you missed a foe, you know; or you would n't have come here, you know. Well, then; ain't it reasonable to ask, who was it?" Thus Mr. Inspector.

"You must excuse my telling you. No class of man can understand better than you, that families may not choose to publish their disagreements and misfortunes, except on the last necessity. I do not dispute that you discharge your duty in asking me the question; you will not dispute my right to withhold the answer. Good night."

Again he turned towards the wicket, where the satellite, with his eye upon his chief, remained a dumb statue.

"At least," said Mr. Inspector, "you will not object to leave me your card, sir?"

"I should not object, if I had one; but I have not." He reddened and was much confused as he gave the answer.

"At least," said Mr. Inspector, with no change of voice or manner, "you will not object to write down your name and address?"

"Not at all."

Mr. Inspector dipped a pen in his inkstand, and deftly laid it on a piece of paper close beside him; then resumed his former attitude. The stranger stepped up to the desk, and wrote in a rather tremulous hand — Mr. Inspector taking sidelong note of every hair of his head when it was bent down for the purpose — "Mr. Julius Handford, Exchequer Coffee House, Palace Yard, Westminster."

"Staying there, I presume, sir?"

"Staying there."

"Consequently from the country?"

"Eh? Yes — from the country."

"Good night, sir."

The satellite removed his arm and opened the wicket, and Mr. Julius Handford went out.

"Reserve!" said Mr. Inspector. "Take care of this piece of paper, keep him in view without giving offence, ascertain that he *is* staying there, and find out anything you can about him."

The satellite was gone; and Mr. Inspector, becoming once again the quiet Abbot of that Monastery, dipped his pen in his ink and resumed his books. The two friends who had watched him, more amused by the professional manner than suspicious of Mr. Julius Handford, inquired before taking their departure too, whether he believed there was anything that really looked bad here?

The Abbot replied with reticence, "could n't say. If a murder, anybody might have done it. Burglary or pocket-picking wanted 'prenticeship. Not so, murder. We were all of us up to that. Had seen scores of people come to identify, and never saw one person struck in that particular way. Might, however, have been Stomach and not Mind. If so, rum stomach. But to be sure there were rum everythings. Pity there was not a word of truth in that superstition about bodies bleeding when touched by the hand of the right person; you never got a sign out of bodies. You got row enough out of such as her — she was good for all night now" (referring here to the banging demands for the liver), "but you got nothing out of bodies if it was ever so."

There being nothing more to be done until the Inquest was held next day, the friends went away together, and Gaffer Hexam and his son went their separate way. But arriving at the last corner, Gaffer bade his boy go home while he turned into a red-curtained tavern, that stood dropsically bulging over the causeway, "for a half-a-pint."

The boy lifted the latch he had lifted before, and found his sister again seated before the fire at her work. Who raised her head upon his coming in and asking: —

"Where did you go, Liz?"

"I went out in the dark."

"There was no necessity for that. It was all right enough."

"One of the gentlemen, the one who did n't speak while I was there, looked hard at me. And I was afraid he might know what my face meant. But there! Don't mind me, Charley! I was all in a tremble of another sort when you owned to father you could write a little."

"Ah! But I made believe I wrote so badly, as that it was odds if any one could read it. And when I wrote slowest and smeared out with my finger most, father was best pleased, as he stood looking over me."

The girl put aside her work, and drawing her seat close to his seat by the fire, laid her arm gently on his shoulder.

"You 'll make the most of your time, Charley; won't you?"

"Won't I? Come! I like that. Don't I?"

"Yes, Charley, yes. You work hard at your learning, I know. And I work a little, Charley, and plan and contrive a little (wake out of my sleep, contriving sometimes), how to get together a shilling now, and a shilling then, that shall make father believe you are beginning to earn a stray living along-shore."

"You are father's favourite, and can make him believe anything."

"I wish I could, Charley! For if I could make him believe that learning was a good thing, and that we might lead better lives, I should be a'most content to die."

"Don't talk stuff about dying, Liz."

She placed her hands on one another on his shoulder, and laying her rich brown cheek against them as she looked down at the fire, went on thoughtfully: —

"Of an evening, Charley, when you are at the school, and father's —"

"At the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters," the boy struck in, with a backward nod of his head towards the public-house.

"Yes. Then as I sit a looking at the fire, I seem to see in the burning coal — like where that glow is now —"

"That 's gas, that is," said the boy, "coming out of a bit of a forest that 's been under the mud that was under the water in the days of Noah's Ark. Look here! When I take the poker — so — and give it a dig —"

"Don't disturb it, Charley, or it 'll be all in a blaze. It 's

that dull glow near it, coming and going, that I mean. When I look at it of an evening, it comes like pictures to me, Charley."

"Show us a picture," said the boy. "Tell us where to look."

"Ah! It wants my eyes, Charley."

"Cut away, then, and tell us what your eyes make of it."

"Why, there are you and me, Charley, when you were quite a baby that never knew a mother —"

"Don't go saying I never knew a mother," interposed the boy, "for I knew a little sister that was sister and mother both."

The girl laughed delightedly, and her eyes filled with pleasant tears, as he put both his arms round her waist and so held her.

"There are you and me, Charley, when father was away at work and locked us out, for fear we should set ourselves afire or fall out of window, sitting on the door-sill, sitting on other door-steps, sitting on the bank of a river, wandering about to get through the time. You are rather heavy to carry, Charley, and I am often obliged to rest. Sometimes we are sleepy and fall asleep together in a corner, sometimes we are very hungry, sometimes we are a little frightened, but what is oftenest hard upon us is the cold. You remember, Charley."

"I remember," said the boy, pressing her to him twice or thrice, "that I snuggled under a little shawl, and it was warm there."

"Sometimes it rains, and we creep under a boat or the like of that; sometimes it's dark, and we get among the gaslights, sitting watching the people as they go along the streets. At last, up comes father and takes us home. And home seems such a shelter after out-of-doors! And father pulls my shoes off, and dries my feet at the fire, and has me to sit by him while he smokes his pipe long after you are abed, and I notice that father's is a large hand but never a heavy one when it touches me, and that father's is a rough voice but never an angry one when it speaks to me. So I grow up, and little by little father trusts me, and makes me his companion, and, let him be put out as he may, never once strikes me."

The listening boy gave a grunt here, as much as to say, "But he strikes *me* though!"

"Those are some of the pictures of what is past, Charley."

"Cut away again," said the boy, "and give us a fortune-telling one; a future one."

"Well! There am I, continuing with father and holding to father, because father loves me and I love father. I can't so much as read a book, because, if I had learned, father would have thought I was deserting him, and I should have lost my influence. I have not the influence I want to have, I cannot stop some dreadful things I try to stop, but I go on in the hope and trust that the time will come. In the mean while I know that I am in some things a stay to father, and that if I was not faithful to him he would — in revenge-like, or in disappointment, or both — go wild and bad."

"Give us a touch of the fortune-telling pictures about me."

"I was passing on to them, Charley," said the girl, who had not changed her attitude since she began, and who now mournfully shook her head; "the others were all leading up. There are you —"

"Where am I, Liz?"

"Still in the hollow down by the flare."

"There seems to be the deuce-and-all in the hollow down by the flare," said the boy, glancing from her eyes to the brazier, which had a grisly skeleton look on its long thin legs.

"There are you, Charley, working your way, in secret from father, at the school; and you get prizes; and you go on better and better; and you come to be a — what was it you called it when you told me about that?"

"Ha, ha! Fortune-telling not know the name!" cried the boy, seeming to be rather relieved by this default on the part of the hollow down by the flare. "Pupil-teacher."

"You come to be a pupil-teacher, and you still go on better and better, and you rise to be a master full of learning and respect. But the secret has come to father's knowledge long before, and it has divided you from father, and from me."

"No, it has n't!"

"Yes, it has, Charley. I see as plain as plain can be, that your way is not ours, and that even if father could be got to forgive your taking it (which he never could be), that way of yours would be darkened by our way. But I see too, Charley —"

"Still as plain as plain can be, Liz?" asked the boy playfully.

"Ah! Still. That it is a great work to have cut you away

from father's life, and to have made a new and good beginning. So there am I, Charley, left alone with father, keeping him as straight as I can, watching for more influence than I have, and hoping that through some fortunate chance, or when he is ill, or when — I don't know what — I may turn him to wish to do better things."

"You said you could n't read a book, Lizzie. Your library of books is the hollow down by the flare, I think."

"I should be very glad to be able to read real books. I feel my want of learning very much, Charley. But I should feel it much more, if I did n't know it to be a tie between me and father. — Hark! Father's tread!"

It being now past midnight, the bird of prey went straight to roost. At mid-day following he reappeared at the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, in the character, not new to him, of a witness before a Coroner's Jury.

Mr. Mortimer Lightwood, besides sustaining the character of one of the witnesses, doubled the part with that of the eminent solicitor who watched the proceedings on behalf of the representatives of the deceased, as was duly recorded in the newspapers. Mr. Inspector watched the proceedings too, and kept his watching closely to himself. Mr. Julius Handford, having given his right address, and being reported in solvent circumstances as to his bill, though nothing more was known of him at his hotel except that his way of life was very retired, had no summons to appear, and was merely present in the shades of Mr. Inspector's mind.

The case was made interesting to the public, by Mr. Mortimer Lightwood's evidence touching the circumstances under which the deceased, Mr. John Harmon, had returned to England; exclusive private proprietorship in which circumstances was set up at dinner-tables for several days, by Veneering, Twemlow, Podsnap, and all the Buffers: who all related them irreconcilably with one another, and contradicted themselves. It was also made interesting by the testimony of Job Potterson, the ship's steward, and one Mr. Jacob Kibble, a fellow-passenger, that the deceased Mr. John Harmon did bring over, in a hand-valise with which he did disembark, the sum realised by the forced sale of his little landed property, and that the sum exceeded, in ready money, seven hundred pounds. It was further made interesting, by the remarkable experiences of Jesse

Hexam in having rescued from the Thames so many dead bodies, and for whose behoof a rapturous admirer subscribing himself "A friend to Burial" (perhaps an undertaker), sent eighteen postage stamps, and five "Now Sir"s to the editor of the Times.

Upon the evidence adduced before them, the Jury found, That the body of Mr. John Harmon had been discovered floating in the Thames, in an advanced state of decay, and much injured; and that the said Mr. John Harmon had come by his death under highly suspicious circumstances, though by whose act or in what precise manner there was no evidence before this Jury to show. And they appended to their verdict a recommendation to the Home Office (which Mr. Inspector appeared to think highly sensible), to offer a reward for the solution of the mystery. Within eight-and-forty hours, a reward of One Hundred Pounds was proclaimed, together with a free pardon to any person or persons not the actual perpetrator or perpetrators, and so forth in due form.

This Proclamation rendered Mr. Inspector additionally studious, and caused him to stand meditating on river-stairs and causeways, and to go lurking about in boats, putting this and that together. But according to the success with which you put this and that together, you get a woman and a fish apart, or a Mermaid in combination. And Mr. Inspector could turn out nothing better than a Mermaid, which no Judge and Jury would believe in.

Thus, like the tides on which it had been borne to the knowledge of men, the Harmon Murder — as it came to be popularly called — went up and down, and ebbed and flowed, now in the town, now in the country, now among palaces, now among hovels, now among lords and ladies and gentlefolks, now among labourers and hammerers and ballast-heavers, until at last, after a long interval of slack water, it got out to sea and drifted away.

CHAPTER IV

THE R. WILFER FAMILY

REGINALD WILFER is a name with rather a grand sound, suggesting on first acquaintance brasses in country churches, scrolls in stained-glass windows, and generally the De Wilfers who came over with the Conqueror. For it is a remarkable fact in genealogy that no De Any ones ever came over with Anybody else.

But the Reginald Wilfer family were of such commonplace extraction and pursuits that their forefathers had for generations modestly subsisted on the Docks, the Excise Office, and the Custom House, and the existing R. Wilfer was a poor clerk. So poor a clerk, though having a limited salary and an unlimited family, that he had never yet attained the modest object of his ambition: which was, to wear a complete new suit of clothes, hat and boots included, at one time. His black hat was brown before he could afford a coat, his pantaloons were white at the seams and knees before he could buy a pair of boots, his boots had worn out before he could treat himself to new pantaloons, and, by the time he worked round to the hat again, that shining modern article roofed in an ancient ruin of various periods.

If the conventional Cherub could ever grow up and be clothed, he might be photographed as a portrait of Wilfer. His chubby, smooth, innocent appearance was a reason for his being always treated with condescension when he was not put down. A stranger entering his own poor house at about ten o'clock P.M. might have been surprised to find him sitting up to supper. So boyish was he in his curves and proportions, that his old schoolmaster, meeting him in Cheapside, might have been unable to withstand the temptation of caning him on the spot. In short, he was the conventional cherub, after the supposititious shoot just mentioned, rather grey, with signs of care on his expression, and in decidedly insolvent circumstances.

He was shy, and unwilling to own to the name of Reginald,

as being too aspiring and self-assertive a name. In his signature he used only the initial R., and imparted what it really stood for, to none but chosen friends, under the seal of confidence. Out of this, the facetious habit had arisen in the neighbourhood surrounding Mincing Lane of making Christian names for him of adjectives and participles beginning with R. Some of these were more or less appropriate: as Rusty, Retiring, Ruddy, Round, Ripe, Ridiculous, Ruminative; others derived their point from their want of application: as Raging, Rattling, Roaring, Raffish. But his popular name was Rumty, which in a moment of inspiration had been bestowed upon him by a gentleman of convivial habits connected with the drug-market, as the beginning of a social chorus, his leading part in the execution of which had led this gentleman to the Temple of Fame, and of which the whole expressive burden ran: —

> "Rumty, iddity, row dow dow,
> Sing toodlely, teedlely, bow wow wow."

Thus he was constantly addressed, even in minor notes on business, as "Dear Rumty"; in answer to which, he sedately signed himself, "Yours truly, R. Wilfer."

He was clerk in the drug-house of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles. Chicksey and Stobbles, his former masters, had both become absorbed in Veneering, once their traveller or commission agent: who had signalised his accession to supreme power by bringing into the business a quantity of plate-glass window and French-polished mahogany partition, and a gleaming and enormous door-plate.

R. Wilfer locked up his desk one evening, and, putting his bunch of keys in his pocket much as if it were his peg-top, made for home. His home was in the Holloway region north of London, and then divided from it by fields and trees. Between Battle Bridge and that part of the Holloway district in which he dwelt, was a tract of suburban Sahara, where tiles and bricks were burnt, bones were boiled, carpets were beat, rubbish was shot, dogs were fought, and dust was heaped by contractors. Skirting the border of this desert, by the way he took, when the light of its kiln-fires made lurid smears on the fog, R. Wilfer sighed and shook his head.

"Ah me!" said he, "what might have been is not what is!"

With which commentary on human life, indicating an experi-

ence of it not exclusively his own, he made the best of his way to the end of his journey.

Mrs. Wilfer was, of course, a tall woman and an angular. Her lord being cherubic, she was necessarily majestic, according to the principle which matrimonially unites contrasts. She was much given to tying up her head in a pocket-handkerchief, knotted under the chin. This head-gear, in conjunction with a pair of gloves worn within doors, she seemed to consider as at once a kind of armour against misfortune (invariably assuming it when in low spirits or difficulties), and as a species of full dress. It was therefore with some sinking of the spirit that her husband beheld her thus heroically attired, putting down her candle in the little hall, and coming down the door-steps through the little front court to open the gate for him.

Something had gone wrong with the house door, for R. Wilfer stopped on the steps, staring at it, and cried: —

"Hal — loa?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Wilfer, "the man came himself with a pair of pincers, and took it off, and took it away. He said that as he had no expectation of ever being paid for it, and as he had an order for another LADIES' SCHOOL door-plate, it was better (burnished up) for the interests of all parties."

"Perhaps it was, my dear; what do you think?"

"You are master here, R. W.," returned his wife. "It is as you think; not as I do. Perhaps it might have been better if the man had taken the door too?"

"My dear, we could n't have done without the door."

"Could n't we?"

"Why, my dear! Could we?"

"It is as you think, R. W.; not as I do." With those submissive words, the dutiful wife preceded him down a few stairs to a little basement front room, half kitchen, half parlour, where a girl of about nineteen, with an exceedingly pretty figure and face, but with an impatient and petulant expression both in her face and in her shoulders (which in her sex and at her age are very expressive of discontent), sat playing draughts with a younger girl, who was the youngest of the House of Wilfer. Not to encumber this page by telling off the Wilfers in detail and casting them up in the gross, it is enough for the present that the rest were what is called "out in the world," in various ways, and that they were Many. So many, that

when one of his dutiful children called in to see him, R. Wilfer generally seemed to say to himself, after a little mental arithmetic, "Oh! here's another of 'em!" before adding aloud, "How de do, John," or Susan, as the case might be.

"Well Piggywiggies," said R. W., "how de do to-night? What I was thinking of, my dear," to Mrs. Wilfer already seated in a corner with folded gloves, "was, that as we have let our first floor so well, and as we have now no place in which you could teach pupils, even if pupils —"

"The milkman said he knew of two young ladies of the highest respectability who were in search of a suitable establishment, and he took a card," interposed Mrs. Wilfer, with severe monotony, as if she were reading an Act of Parliament aloud. "Tell your father whether it was last Monday, Bella."

"But we never heard any more of it, ma," said Bella, the elder girl.

"In addition to which, my dear," her husband urged, "if you have no place to put two young persons into —"

"Pardon me," Mrs. Wilfer again interposed; "they were not young persons. Two young ladies of the highest respectability. Tell your father, Bella, whether the milkman said so."

"My dear, it is the same thing."

"No it is not," said Mrs. Wilfer, with the same impressive monotony. "Pardon me!"

"I mean, my dear, it is the same thing as to space. As to space. If you have no space in which to put two youthful fellow-creatures, however eminently respectable, which I do not doubt, where are those youthful fellow-creatures to be accommodated? I carry it no further than that. And solely looking at it," said her husband, making the stipulation at once in a conciliatory, complimentary, and argumentative tone — "as I am sure you will agree, my love — from a fellow-creature point of view, my dear."

"I have nothing more to say," returned Mrs. Wilfer, with a meek renunciatory action of her gloves. "It is as you think, R. W.; not as I do."

Here the huffing of Miss Bella and the loss of three of her men at a swoop, aggravated by the coronation of an opponent, led to that young lady's jerking the draught-board and pieces off the table: which her sister went down on her knees to pick up.

"Poor Bella!" said Mrs. Wilfer.

"And poor Lavinia, perhaps, my dear?" suggested R. W.

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Wilfer, "no!"

It was one of the worthy woman's specialties that she had an amazing power of gratifying her splenetic or worldly-minded humours by extolling her own family: which she thus proceeded, in the present case, to do.

"No, R. W. Lavinia has not known the trial that Bella has known. The trial that your daughter Bella has undergone is, perhaps, without a parallel, and has been borne, I will say, nobly. When you see your daughter Bella in her black dress, which she alone of all the family wears, and when you remember the circumstances which have led to her wearing it, and when you know how those circumstances have been sustained, then, R. W., lay your head upon your pillow and say, 'poor Lavinia!'"

Here, Miss Lavinia, from her kneeling situation under the table, put in that she did n't want to be "poored by pa," or anybody else.

"I am sure you do not, my dear," returned her mother, "for you have a fine, brave spirit. And your sister Cecilia has a fine brave spirit of another kind, a spirit of pure devotion, a beautiful spirit! The self-sacrifice of Cecilia reveals a pure and womanly character, very seldom equalled, never surpassed. I have now in my pocket a letter from your sister Cecilia, received this morning — received three months after her marriage, poor child! — in which she tells me that her husband must unexpectedly shelter under their roof his reduced aunt. 'But I will be true to him, mamma,' she touchingly writes, 'I will not leave him, I must not forget that he is my husband. Let his aunt come!' If this is not pathetic, if this is not woman's devotion — !" The good lady waved her gloves in a sense of the impossibility of saying more, and tied the pocket-handkerchief over her head in a tighter knot under her chin.

Bella, who was now seated on the rug to warm herself, with her brown eyes on the fire and a handful of her brown curls in her mouth, laughed at this, and then pouted and half cried.

"I am sure," said she, "though you have no feeling for me, pa, I am one of the most unfortunate girls that ever lived. You know how poor we are" (it is probable he did, having some reason to know it!), "and what a glimpse of wealth I had,

and how it melted away, and how I am here in this ridiculous mourning — which I hate! — a kind of a widow who never was married. And yet you don't feel for me. — Yes you do, yes you do."

This abrupt change was occasioned by her father's face. She stopped to pull him down from his chair in an attitude highly favourable to strangulation, and to give him a kiss and a pat or two on the cheek.

"But you ought to feel for me, you know, pa."

"My dear, I do."

"Yes, and I say you ought to. If they had only left me alone and told me nothing about it, it would have mattered much less. But that nasty Mr. Lightwood feels it his duty, as he says, to write and tell me what is in reserve for me, and then I am obliged to get rid of George Sampson."

Here, Lavinia, rising to the surface with the last draught-man rescued, interposed, "You never cared for George Sampson, Bella."

"And did I say I did, miss?" Then pouting again, with the curls in her mouth; "George Sampson was very fond of me, and admired me very much, and put up with everything I did to him."

"You were rude enough to him," Lavinia again interposed.

"And did I say I was n't, miss. I am not setting up to be sentimental about George Sampson. I only say George Sampson was better than nothing."

"You did n't show him that you thought even that," Lavinia again interposed.

"You are a chit and a little idiot," returned Bella, "or you would n't make such a dolly speech. What did you expect me to do? Wait till you are a woman, and don't talk about what you don't understand. You only show your ignorance!" Then, whimpering again, and at intervals biting the curls, and stopping to look how much was bitten off, "It 's a shame! There never was such a hard case! I should n't care so much if it was n't so ridiculous. It was ridiculous enough to have a stranger coming over to marry me, whether he liked it or not. It was ridiculous enough to know what an embarrassing meeting it would be, and how we never could pretend to have an inclination of our own, either of us. It was ridiculous enough to know I should n't like him — how *could* I like him, left to him

in a will, like a dozen of spoons, with everything cut and dried beforehand, like orange chips! Talk of orange flowers indeed! I declare again it's a shame! Those ridiculous points would have been smoothed away by the money, for I love money, and want money — want it dreadfully. I hate to be poor, and we are degradingly poor, offensively poor, miserably poor, beastly poor. But here I am, left with all the ridiculous parts of the situation remaining, and, added to them all, this ridiculous dress! And if the truth was known, when the Harmon murder was all over the town, and people were speculating on its being suicide, I dare say those impudent wretches at the clubs and places made jokes about the miserable creature's having preferred a watery grave to me. It's likely enough they took such liberties: I should n't wonder! I declare it 's a very hard case indeed, and I am a most unfortunate girl. The idea of being a kind of a widow, and never having been married! And the idea of being as poor as ever after all, and going into black, besides, for a man I never saw, and should have hated — as far as *he* was concerned — if I had seen!"

The young lady's lamentations were checked at this point by a knuckle, knocking at the half-open door of the room. The knuckle had knocked two or three times already, but had not been heard.

"Who is it?" said Mrs. Wilfer, in her Act-of-Parliament manner. "Enter!"

A gentleman coming in, Miss Bella, with a short and sharp exclamation, scrambled off the hearth-rug and massed the bitten curls together in their right place on her neck.

"The servant girl had her key in the door as I came up, and directed me to this room, telling me I was expected. I am afraid I should have asked her to announce me."

"Pardon me," returned Mrs. Wilfer. "Not at all. Two of my daughters. R. W., this is the gentleman who has taken your first floor. He was so good as to make an appointment for to-night, when you would be at home."

A dark gentleman. Thirty at the utmost. An expressive, one might say handsome face. A very bad manner. In the last degree constrained, reserved, diffident, troubled. His eyes were on Miss Bella for an instant, and then looked at the ground as he addressed the master of the house.

"Seeing that I am quite satisfied, Mr. Wilfer, with the

rooms, and with their situation, and with their price, I suppose a memorandum between us of two or three lines, and a payment down, will bind the bargain? I wish to send in furniture without delay."

Two or three times during this short address, the cherub addressed had made chubby motions towards a chair. The gentleman now took it, laying a hesitating hand on a corner of the table, and with another hesitating hand lifting the crown of his hat to his lips, and drawing it before his mouth.

"The gentleman, R. W.," said Mrs. Wilfer, "proposes to take your apartments by the quarter. A quarter's notice on either side."

"Shall I mention, sir," insinuated the landlord, expecting it to be received as a matter of course, "the form of a reference?"

"I think," returned the gentleman, after a pause, "that a reference is not necessary; neither, to say the truth, is it convenient, for I am a stranger in London. I require no reference from you, and perhaps, therefore, you will require none from me. That will be fair on both sides. Indeed, I show the greater confidence of the two, for I will pay in advance whatever you please, and I am going to trust my furniture here. Whereas, if you were in embarrassed circumstances — this is merely supposititious — "

Conscience causing R. Wilfer to colour, Mrs. Wilfer, from a corner (she always got into stately corners) came to the rescue with a deep-toned "Per-fectly."

"— Why then I — might lose it."

"Well!" observed R. Wilfer cheerfully, "money and goods are certainly the best of references."

"Do you think they *are* the best, pa?" asked Miss Bella, in a low voice, and without looking over the shoulder as she warmed her foot on the fender.

"Among the best, my dear."

"I should have thought, myself, it was so easy to add the usual kind of one," said Bella, with a toss of her curls.

The gentleman listened to her, with a face of marked attention, though he neither looked up nor changed his attitude. He sat, still and silent, until his future landlord accepted his proposals, and brought writing materials to complete the business. He sat, still and silent, while the landlord wrote.

When the agreement was ready in duplicate (the landlord having worked at it like some cherubic scribe, in what is conventionally called a doubtful, which means a not at all doubtful, Old Master), it was signed by the contracting parties, Bella looking on as scornful witness. The contracting parties were R. Wilfer and John Rokesmith, Esquire.

When it came to Bella's turn to sign her name, Mr. Rokesmith, who was standing, as he had sat, with a hesitating hand upon the table, looked at her stealthily but narrowly. He looked at the pretty figure bending down over the paper and saying, "Where am I to go, pa? Here, in this corner?" He looked at the beautiful brown hair, shading the coquettish face; he looked at the free dash of the signature, which was a bold one for a woman's; and then they looked at one another.

"Much obliged to you, Miss Wilfer."

"Obliged?"

"I have given you so much trouble."

"Signing my name? Yes, certainly. But I am your landlord's daughter, sir."

As there was nothing more to do but pay eight sovereigns in earnest of the bargain, pocket the agreement, appoint a time for the arrival of his furniture and himself, and go, Mr. Rokesmith did that as awkwardly as it might be done, and was escorted by his landlord to the outer air. When R. Wilfer returned, candlestick in hand, to the bosom of his family, he found the bosom agitated.

"Pa," said Bella, "we have got a Murderer for a tenant."

"Pa," said Lavinia, "we have got a Robber."

"To see him unable for his life to look anybody in the face!" said Bella. "There never was such an exhibition."

"My dears," said their father, "he is a diffident gentleman, and I should say particularly so in the society of girls of your age."

"Nonsense, our age!" cried Bella impatiently. "What's that got to do with him?"

"Besides, we are not of the same age: — which age?" demanded Lavinia.

"Never *you* mind, Lavvy," retorted Bella; "you wait till you are of an age to ask such questions. Pa, mark my words! Between Mr. Rokesmith and me there is a natural antipathy and a deep distrust; and something will come of it!"

"My dear, and girls," said the cherub-patriarch, "between Mr. Rokesmith and me there is a matter of eight sovereigns, and something for supper shall come of it, if you 'll agree upon the article."

This was a neat and happy turn to give the subject, treats being rare in the Wilfer household, where a monotonous appearance of Dutch cheese at ten o'clock in the evening had been rather frequently commented on by the dimpled shoulders of Miss Bella. Indeed, the modest Dutchman himself seemed conscious of his want of variety, and generally came before the family in a state of apologetic perspiration. After some discussion on the relative merits of veal cutlet, sweet-bread, and lobster, a decision was pronounced in favour of veal cutlet. Mrs. Wilfer then solemnly divested herself of her handkerchief and gloves, as a preliminary sacrifice to preparing the frying-pan, and R. W. himself went out to purchase the viand. He soon returned, bearing the same in a fresh cabbage-leaf, where it coyly embraced a rasher of ham. Melodious sounds were not long in rising from the frying-pan on the fire, or in seeming, as the firelight danced in the mellow halls of a couple of full bottles on the table, to play appropriate dance-music.

The cloth was laid by Lavvy. Bella, as the acknowledged ornament of the family, employed both her hands in giving her hair an additional wave while sitting in the easiest chair, and occasionally threw in a direction touching the supper: as, "Very brown, ma;" or, to her sister, "Put the salt-cellar straight, miss, and don't be a dowdy little puss."

Meantime her father, chinking Mr. Rokesmith's gold as he sat expectant between his knife and fork, remarked that six of those sovereigns came just in time for their landlord, and stood them in a little pile on the white tablecloth to look at.

"I hate our landlord!" said Bella.

But observing a fall in her father's face, she went and sat down by him at the table, and began touching up his hair with the handle of a fork. It was one of the girl's spoilt ways to be always arranging the family's hair — perhaps because her own was so pretty, and occupied so much of her attention.

"You deserve to have a house of your own; don't you, poor pa?"

"I don't deserve it better than another, my dear."

"At any rate I, for one, want it more than another," said

Bella, holding him by the chin, as she stuck his flaxen hair on end, "and I grudge this money going to the Monster that swallows up so much, when we all want — Everything. And if you say (as you want to say; I know you want to say so, pa) 'that 's neither reasonable nor honest, Bella,' then I answer, 'May be not, pa — very likely — but it 's one of the consequences of being poor, and of thoroughly hating and detesting to be poor, and that 's my case.' Now, you look lovely, pa; why don't you always wear your hair like that? And here 's the cutlet! If it is n't very brown, ma, I can't eat it, and must have a bit put back to be done expressly."

However, as it was brown, even to Bella's taste, the young lady graciously partook of it without reconsignment to the frying-pan, and also, in due course, of the contents of the two bottles, whereof one held Scotch ale and the other rum. The latter perfume, with the fostering aid of boiling water and lemon-peel, diffused itself throughout the room, and became so highly concentrated around the warm fireside, that the wind passing over the house roof must have rushed off charged with a delicious whiff of it, after buzzing like a great bee at that particular chimney-pot.

"Pa," said Bella, sipping the fragrant mixture and warming her favourite ankle; "when old Mr. Harmon made such a fool of me (not to mention himself, as he is dead), what do you suppose he did it for?"

"Impossible to say, my dear. As I have told you times out of number since his will was brought to light, I doubt if I ever exchanged a hundred words with the old gentleman. If it was his whim to surprise us, his whim succeeded. For he certainly did it."

"And I was stamping my foot and screaming, when he first took notice of me; was I?" said Bella, contemplating the ankle before mentioned.

"You were stamping your little foot, my dear, and screaming with your little voice, and laying into me with your little bonnet, which you had snatched off for the purpose," returned her father, as the remembrance gave a relish to the rum; "you were doing this one Sunday morning, when I took you out, because I did n't go the exact way you wanted, when the old gentleman, sitting on a seat near, said, 'That 's a nice girl; that 's a *very* nice girl; a promising girl!' And so you were, my dear."

"And then he asked my name, did he, pa?"

"Then he asked your name, my dear, and mine; and on other Sunday mornings, when we walked his way, we saw him again, and — and really that 's all."

As that was all the rum and water too, or, in other words, as R. W. delicately signified that his glass was empty, by throwing back his head and standing the glass upside down on his nose and upper lip, it might have been charitable in Mrs. Wilfer to suggest replenishment. But that heroine briefly suggesting "Bedtime" instead, the bottles were put away, and the family retired; she cherubically escorted, like some severe saint in a painting, or merely human matron allegorically treated.

"And by this time to-morrow," said Lavinia when the two girls were alone in their room, "we shall have Mr. Rokesmith here, and shall be expecting to have our throats cut."

"You need n't stand between me and the candle for all that," retorted Bella. "This is another of the consequences of being poor! The idea of a girl with a really fine head of hair having to do it by one flat candle and a few inches of looking-glass!"

"You caught George Sampson with it, Bella, bad as your means of dressing it are."

"You low little thing. Caught George Sampson with it! Don't talk about catching people, miss, till your own time for catching — as you call it — comes."

"Perhaps it has come," muttered Lavvy, with a toss of her head.

"What did you say?" asked Bella, very sharply. "What did you say, miss?"

Lavvy declining equally to repeat or to explain, Bella gradually lapsed over her hair-dressing into a soliloquy on the miseries of being poor, as exemplified in having nothing to put on, nothing to go out in, nothing to dress by, only a nasty box to dress at instead of a commodious dressing-table, and being obliged to take in suspicious lodgers. On the last grievance as her climax, she laid great stress — and might have laid greater, had she known that if Mr. Julius Handford had a twin brother upon earth, Mr. John Rokesmith was the man.

CHAPTER V

BOFFIN'S BOWER

Over against a London house, a corner house not far from Cavendish Square, a man with a wooden leg had sat for some years, with his remaining foot in a basket in cold weather, picking up a living on this wise. Every morning at eight o'clock he stumped to the corner, carrying a chair, a clothes-horse, a pair of trestles, a board, a basket, and an umbrella, all strapped together. Separating these, the board and trestles became a counter, the basket supplied the few small lots of fruit and sweets that he offered for sale upon it and became a foot-warmer, the unfolded clothes-horse displayed a choice collection of halfpenny ballads and became a screen, and the stool planted within it became his post for the rest of the day. All weathers saw the man at the post. This is to be accepted in a double sense, for he contrived a back to his wooden stool, by placing it against the lamp-post. When the weather was wet, he put up his umbrella over his stock in trade, not over himself; when the weather was dry, he furled that faded article, tied it round with a piece of yarn, and laid it cross-wise under the trestles; where it looked like an unwholesomely forced lettuce that had lost in colour and crispness what it had gained in size.

He had established his right to the corner, by imperceptible prescription. He had never varied his ground an inch, but had in the beginning diffidently taken the corner upon which the side of the house gave. A howling corner in the winter-time, a dusty corner in the summer-time, an undesirable corner at the best of times. Shelterless fragments of straw and paper got up revolving storms there, when the main street was at peace; and the water-cart, as if it were drunk or short-sighted, came blundering and jolting round it, making it muddy when all else was clean.

On the front of his sale-board hung a little placard, like a kettle-holder, bearing the inscription in his own small text: —

Errands gone
On With fi
Delity By
Ladies and Gentlemen
I remain
Your humble Servt:
Silas Wegg.

He had not only settled it with himself in course of time, that he was errand-goer by appointment to the house at the corner (though he received such commissions not half a dozen times in a year, and then only as some servant's deputy), but also that he was one of the house's retainers and owed vassalage to it and was bound to leal and loyal interest in it. For this reason, he always spoke of it as "Our House," and, though his knowledge of its affairs was mostly speculative and all wrong, claimed to be in its confidence. On similar grounds he never beheld an inmate at any one of its windows but he touched his hat. Yet he knew so little about the inmates that he gave them names of his own invention: as "Miss Elizabeth," "Master George," "Aunt Jane," "Uncle Parker" — having no authority whatever for any such designations, but particularly the last — to which, as a natural consequence, he stuck with great obstinacy.

Over the house itself he exercised the same imaginary power as over its inhabitants and their affairs. He had never been in it, the length of a piece of fat black water-pipe which trailed itself over the area-door into a damp stone passage, and had rather the air of a leech on the house that had "taken" wonderfully; but this was no impediment to his arranging it according to a plan of his own. It was a great dingy house with a quantity of dim side window and blank back premises, and it cost his mind a world of trouble so to lay it out as to account for everything in its external appearance. But this, once done, was quite satisfactory, and he rested persuaded that he knew his way about the house blindfold: from the barred garrets in the high roof, to the two iron extinguishers before the main door — which seemed to request all lively visitors to have the kindness to put themselves out before entering.

Assuredly, this stall of Silas Wegg's was the hardest little stall of all the sterile little stalls in London. It gave you the face-ache to look at his apples, the stomach-ache to look at his oranges, the tooth-ache to look at his nuts. Of the latter commodity he had always a grim little heap, on which lay a little wooden measure which had no discernible inside, and was considered to represent the penn'orth appointed by Magna Charta. Whether from too much east wind or no — it was an easterly corner — the stall, the stock, and the keeper, were all as dry as the desert. Wegg was a knotty man, and a close-grained, with a face carved out of very hard material, that had just as much play of expression as a watchman's rattle. When he laughed, certain jerks occurred in it, and the rattle sprung. Sooth to say, he was so wooden a man that he seemed to have taken his wooden leg naturally, and rather suggested to the fanciful observer, that he might be expected — if his development received no untimely check — to be completely set up with a pair of wooden legs in about six months.

Mr. Wegg was an observant person, or, as he himself said, "took a powerful sight of notice." He saluted all his regular passers-by every day, as he sat on his stool backed up by the lamp-post; and on the adaptable character of these salutes he greatly plumed himself. Thus, to the rector, he addressed a bow, compounded of lay deference, and a slight touch of the shady preliminary meditation at church; to the doctor, a confidential bow, as to a gentleman whose acquaintance with his inside he begged respectfully to acknowledge; before the Quality he delighted to abase himself; and for Uncle Parker, who was in the army (at least so he had settled it), he put his open hand to the side of his hat, in a military manner which that angry-eyed, buttoned-up, inflammatory-faced old gentleman appeared but imperfectly to appreciate.

The only article in which Silas dealt, that was not hard, was gingerbread. On a certain day, some wretched infant having purchased the damp gingerbread-horse (fearfully out of condition), and the adhesive bird-cage, which had been exposed for the day's sale, he had taken a tin box from under his stool to produce a relay of those dreadful specimens, and was going to look in at the lid, when he said to himself, pausing: "Oh! Here you are again!"

The words referred to a broad, round-shouldered, one-sided

old fellow in mourning, coming comically ambling towards the corner, dressed in a pea over-coat, and carrying a large stick. He wore thick shoes, and thick leather gaiters, and thick gloves like a hedger's. Both as to his dress and to himself, he was of an overlapping rhinoceros build, with folds in his cheeks, and his forehead, and his eyelids, and his lips, and his ears; but with bright, eager, childishly-inquiring grey eyes, under his ragged eyebrows and broad-brimmed hat. A very odd-looking old fellow altogether.

"Here you are again," repeated Mr. Wegg, musing. "And what are you now? Are you in the Funns, or where are you? Have you lately come to settle in this neighbourhood, or do you own to another neighbourhood? Are you in independent circumstances, or is it wasting the motions of a bow on you? Come! I'll speculate! I'll invest a bow in you."

Which Mr. Wegg, having replaced his tin box, accordingly did, as he rose to bait his gingerbread-trap for some other devoted infant. The salute was acknowledged with: —

"Morning, sir! Morning! Morning!"

("Calls me Sir!" said Mr. Wegg, to himself. "*He* won't answer. A bow gone!")

"Morning, morning, morning!"

"Appears to be rather a 'arty old cock too," said Mr. Wegg, as before. "Good morning to *you*, sir."

"Do you remember me, then?" asked his new acquaintance, stopping in his amble, one-sided, before the stall, and speaking in a pouncing way, though with great good-humour.

"I have noticed you go past our house, sir, several times in the course of the last week or so."

"Our house," repeated the other. "Meaning — ?"

"Yes," said Mr. Wegg, nodding, as the other pointed the clumsy forefinger of his right glove at the corner house.

"Oh! Now, what," pursued the old fellow, in an inquisitive manner, carrying his knotted stick in his left arm as if it were a baby, "what do they allow you now?"

"It's job work that I do for our house," returned Silas, drily, and with reticence; "it's not yet brought to an exact allowance."

"Oh! It's not yet brought to an exact allowance? No! It's not yet brought to an exact allowance. Oh! — Morning, morning, morning!"

"Appears to be rather a cracked old cock," thought Silas, qualifying his former good opinion, as the other ambled off. But, in a moment he was back again with the question: —

"How did you get your wooden leg?"

Mr. Wegg replied (tartly to this personal inquiry), "In an accident."

"Do you like it?"

"Well! I have n't got to keep it warm," Mr. Wegg made answer, in a sort of desperation occasioned by the singularity of the question.

"He has n't," repeated the other to his knotted stick, as he gave it a hug; "he has n't got — ha! — ha! — to keep it warm! Did you ever hear of the name of Boffin?"

"No," said Mr. Wegg, who was growing restive under this examination. "I never did hear of the name of Boffin."

"Do you like it?"

"Why, no," retorted Mr. Wegg, again approaching desperation; "I can't say I do."

"Why don't you like it?"

"I don't know why I don't," retorted Mr. Wegg, approaching frenzy; "but I don't at all."

"Now, I 'll tell you something that 'll make you sorry for that," said the stranger, smiling. "My name 's Boffin."

"I can't help it!" returned Mr. Wegg. Implying in his manner the offensive addition, "and if I could, I would n't."

"But there 's another chance for you," said Mr. Boffin, smiling still. "Do you like the name of Nicodemus? Think it over. Nick or Noddy."

"It is not, sir," Mr. Wegg rejoined, as he sat down on his stool, with an air of gentle resignation, combined with melancholy candour; "it is not a name as I could wish any one that I had a respect for to call *me* by; but there may be persons that would not view it with the same objections. — I don't know why," Mr. Wegg added, anticipating another question.

"Noddy Boffin," said that gentleman. "Noddy. That 's my name. Noddy — or Nick — Boffin. What 's your name?"

"Silas Wegg. — I don't," said Mr. Wegg, bestirring himself to take the same precaution as before, "I don't know why Silas, and I don't know why Wegg."

"Now, Wegg," said Mr. Boffin, hugging his stick closer, "I

want to make a sort of offer to you. Do you remember when you first see me?"

The wooden Wegg looked at him with a meditative eye, and also with a softened air as descrying possibility of profit. "Let me think. I ain't quite sure, and yet I generally take a powerful sight of notice, too. Was it on a Monday morning, when the butcher-boy had been to our house for orders, and bought a ballad of me, which, being unacquainted with the tune, I run it over to him?"

"Right, Wegg, right! But he bought more than one."

"Yes, to be sure, sir; he bought several; and wishing to lay out his money to the best, he took my opinion to guide his choice, and we went over the collection together. To be sure we did. Here was him as it might be, and here was myself as it might be, and there was you, Mr. Boffin, as you identically are, with your self-same stick under your very same arm, and your very same back towards us. To — be — sure!" added Mr. Wegg, looking a little round Mr. Boffin, to take him in the rear, and identify this last extraordinary coincidence, "your wery self-same back!"

"What do you think I was doing, Wegg?"

"I should judge, sir, that you might be glancing your eye down the street."

"No, Wegg. I was a listening."

"Was you, indeed?" said Mr. Wegg dubiously.

"Not in a dishonourable way, Wegg, because you was singing to the butcher; and you would n't sing secrets to a butcher in the street, you know."

"It never happened that I did so yet, to the best of my remembrance," said Mr. Wegg cautiously. "But I might do it. A man can't say what he might wish to do some day or another." (This, not to release any little advantage he might derive from Mr. Boffin's avowal.)

"Well," repeated Boffin, "I was a listening to you and to him. And what do you — you have n't got another stool, have you? I 'm rather thick in my breath."

"I have n't got another, but you 're welcome to this," said Wegg, resigning it. "It 's a treat to me to stand."

"Lard!" exclaimed Mr. Boffin, in a tone of great enjoyment, as he settled himself down, still nursing his stick like a baby, "it 's a pleasant place, this! And then to be shut in on each

side, with these ballads, like so many book-leaf blinkers! Why, it 's delightful!"

"If I am not mistaken sir," Mr. Wegg delicately hinted, resting a hand on his stall, and bending over the discursive Boffin, "you alluded to some offer or another that was in your mind?"

"I 'm coming to it! All right. I 'm coming to it! I was going to say that when I listened that morning, I listened with hadmiration amounting to haw. I thought to myself, 'Here 's a man with a wooden leg — a literary man with —'"

"N — not exactly so, sir," said Mr. Wegg.

"Why, you know every one of these songs by name and by tune, and if you want to read or to sing any one on 'em off straight, you 've only to whip on your spectacles and do it!" cried Mr. Boffin. "I see you at it!"

"Well, sir," returned Mr. Wegg, with a conscious inclination of the head; "we 'll say literary, then."

"'A literary man — *with* a wooden leg — and all Print is open to him!' That 's what I thought to myself that morning," pursued Mr. Boffin, leaning forward to describe, uncramped by the clothes-horse, as large an arc as his right arm could make; "'all Print is open to him!' And it is, ain't it?"

"Why, truly, sir," Mr. Wegg admitted, with modesty; "I believe you could n't show me the piece of English print that I would n't be equal to collaring and throwing."

"On the spot?" said Mr. Boffin.

"On the spot."

"I knowed it! Then consider this. Here am I, a man without a wooden leg, and yet all print is shut to me."

"Indeed, sir?" Mr. Wegg returned, with increasing self-complacency. "Education neglected?"

"Neg-lected!" repeated Boffin, with emphasis. "That ain't no word for it. I don't mean to say but what if you showed me a B, I could so far give you change for it, as to answer Boffin."

"Come, come, sir," said Mr. Wegg, throwing in a little encouragement, "that 's something too."

"It 's something," answered Mr. Boffin, "but I 'll take my oath it ain't much."

"Perhaps it 's not as much as could be wished by an inquiring mind, sir," Mr. Wegg admitted.

"Now, look here. I'm retired from business. Me and Mrs. Boffin — Henerietty Boffin — which her father's name was Henery, and her mother's name was Hetty, and so you get it — we live on a compittance, under the will of a diseased governor."

"Gentleman dead, sir?"

"Man alive, don't I tell you? A diseased governor? Now, it's too late for me to begin shovelling and sifting at alphabeds and grammar-books. I'm getting to be a old bird, and I want to take it easy. But I want some reading — some fine bold reading, some splendid book in a gorging Lord-Mayor's-Show of wollumes" (probably meaning gorgeous, but misled by association of ideas); "as 'll reach right down your pint of view, and take time to go by you. How can I get that reading, Wegg? By," tapping him on the breast with the head of his stick, "paying a man truly qualified to do it, so much an hour (say twopence) to come and do it."

"Hem! Flattered sir, I am sure," said Wegg, beginning to regard himself quite in a new light. "Hem! This is the offer you mentioned, sir?"

"Yes. Do you like it?"

"I am considering of it, Mr. Boffin."

"I don't," said Boffin, in a free-handed manner, "wan to tie a literary man — *with* a wooden leg — down too tight. A halfpenny an hour sha'n't part us. The hours are your own to choose, after you 've done for the day with your house here. I live over Maiden Lane way — out Holloway direction — and you 've only got to go East-and-by-North when you 've finished here, and you 're there. Twopence halfpenny an hour," said Boffin, taking a piece of chalk from his pocket and getting off the stool to work the sum on the top of it in his own way; "two long 'uns and a short 'un — twopence halfpenny; two short 'uns is a long 'un and two two long 'uns is four long 'uns — making five long 'uns; six nights a week at five long 'uns a night," scoring them all down separately, "and you mount up to thirty long 'uns. A round 'un! Half a crown!"

Pointing to this result as a large and satisfactory one, Mr. Boffin smeared it out with his moistened glove, and sat down on the remains.

"Half a crown," said Wegg, meditating. "Yes. (It ain't much, sir.) Half a crown."

"Per week, you know."

"Per week. Yes. As to the amount of strain upon the intellect now. Was you thinking at all of poetry?" Mr. Wegg inquired, musing.

"Would it come dearer?" Mr. Boffin asked.

"It would come dearer," Mr. Wegg returned. "For when a person comes to grind off poetry night after night, it is but right he should expect to be paid for its weakening effect on his mind."

"To tell you the truth, Wegg," said Boffin, "I was n't thinking of poetry, except in so far as this: If you was to happen now and then to feel yourself in the mind to tip me and Mrs. Boffin one of your ballads, why then we should drop into poetry."

"I follow you, sir," said Wegg. "But not being a regular musical professional, I should be loth to engage myself for that; and therefore when I dropped into poetry, I should ask to be considered so fur, in the light of a friend."

At this, Mr. Boffin's eyes sparkled, and he shook Silas earnestly by the hand: protesting that it was more than he could have asked, and that he took it very kindly indeed.

"What do you think of the terms, Wegg?" Mr. Boffin then demanded, with unconcealed anxiety.

Silas, who had stimulated this anxiety by his hard reserve of manner, and who had begun to understand his man very well, replied with an air; as if he were saying something extraordinarily generous and great: —

"Mr. Boffin, I never bargain."

"So I should have thought of you!" said Mr. Boffin admiringly.

"No, sir. I never did 'aggle and I never will 'aggle. Consequently I meet you at once, free and fair, with — Done, for double the money!"

Mr. Boffin seemed a little unprepared for this conclusion, but assented, with the remark, "You know better what it ought to be than I do, Wegg," and again shook hands with him upon it.

"Could you begin to-night, Wegg?" he then demanded.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Wegg, careful to leave all the eagerness to him. "I see no difficulty if you wish it. You are provided with the needful implement — a book, sir?"

"Bought him at a sale," said Mr. Boffin. "Eight wollumes.

Red and gold. Purple ribbon in every wollume, to keep the place where you leave off. Do you know him?"

"The book's name, sir?" inquired Silas.

"I thought you might have knowed him without it," said Mr. Boffin, slightly disappointed. "His name is Decline-And Fall-Off-The-Rooshan-Empire." (Mr. Boffin went over these stones slowly and with much caution.)

"Ay, indeed!" said Mr. Wegg, nodding his head with an air of friendly recognition.

"You know him, Wegg?"

"I have n't been not to say right slap through him, very lately," Mr. Wegg made answer, "having been otherways employed, Mr. Boffin. But know him? Old familiar declining and falling off the Rooshan? Rather, sir! Ever since I was not so high as your stick. Ever since my eldest brother left our cottage to enlist in the army. On which occasion, as the ballad that was made about it describes: —

"Beside that cottage door, Mr. Boffin,
A girl was on her knees;
She held aloft a snowy scarf, Sir,
Which (my eldest brother noticed) fluttered in the breeze.
She breathed a prayer for him, Mr. Boffin;
A prayer he could not hear.
And my eldest brother lean'd upon his sword, Mr. Boffin,
And wiped away a tear."

Much impressed by this family circumstance, and also by the friendly disposition of Mr. Wegg, as exemplified in his so soon dropping into poetry, Mr. Boffin again shook hands with that ligneous sharper, and besought him to name his hour. Mr. Wegg named eight.

"Where I live," said Mr. Boffin, "is called The Bower. Boffin's Bower is the name Mrs. Boffin christened it when we come into it as a property. If you should meet with anybody that don't know it by that name (which hardly anybody does), when you've got nigh upon about a odd mile, or say and a quarter if you like, up Maiden Lane, Battle Bridge, ask for Harmony Jail, and you'll be put right. I shall expect you, Wegg," said Mr. Boffin, clapping him on the shoulder with the greatest enthusiasm, "most jyfully. I shall have no peace or patience till you come. Print is now opening ahead of me. This night, a literary man — *with* a wooden leg" — he bestowed

an admiring look upon that decoration, as if it greatly enhanced the relish of Mr. Wegg's attainments — "will begin to lead me a new life! My fist again, Wegg. Morning, morning, morning!"

Left alone at his stall as the other ambled off, Mr. Wegg subsided into his screen, produced a small pocket-handkerchief of a penitentially scrubbing character, and took himself by the nose with a thoughtful aspect. Also, while he still grasped that feature, he directed several thoughtful looks down the street, after the retiring figure of Mr. Boffin. But profound gravity sat enthroned on Wegg's countenance. For while he considered within himself that this was an old fellow of rare simplicity, that this was an opportunity to be improved, and that here might be money to be got beyond present calculation, still he compromised himself by no admission that his new engagement was at all out of his way, or involved the least element of the ridiculous. Mr. Wegg would even have picked a handsome quarrel with any one who should have challenged his deep acquaintance with those aforesaid eight volumes of Decline and Fall. His gravity was unusual, portentous, and immeasurable, not because he admitted any doubt of himself, but because he perceived it necessary to forestall any doubt of himself in others. And herein he ranged with that very numerous class of impostors, who are quite as determined to keep up appearances to themselves as to their neighbours.

A certain loftiness, likewise, took possession of Mr. Wegg; a condescending sense of being in request as an official expounder of mysteries. It did not move him to commercial greatness, but rather to littleness, insomuch that if it had been within the possibilities of things for the wooden measure to hold fewer nuts than usual, it would have done so that day. But when night came, and with her veiled eyes beheld him stumping towards Boffin's Bower, he was elated too.

The Bower was as difficult to find as Fair Rosamond's without the clue. Mr. Wegg, having reached the quarter indicated, inquired for the Bower half a dozen times without the least success, until he remembered to ask for Harmony Jail. This occasioned a quick change in the spirits of a hoarse gentleman and a donkey, whom he had much perplexed.

"Why, yer mean Old Harmon's, do yer?" said the hoarse gentleman, who was driving his donkey in a truck, with a carrot

for a whip. "Why did n't yer niver say so? Eddard and me is goin' by *him!* Jump in."

Mr. Wegg complied, and the hoarse gentleman invited his attention to the third person in the company, thus: —

"Now, you look at Eddard's ears. What was it you named, agin? Whisper."

Mr. Wegg whispered, "Boffin's Bower."

"Eddard! (keep yer hi on his ears) cut away to Boffin's Bower!"

Edward, with his ears lying back, remained immovable.

"Eddard! (keep yer hi on his ears) cut away to Old Harmon's!"

Edward instantly pricked up his ears to the utmost, and rattled off at such a pace that Mr. Wegg's conversation was jolted out of him in a most dislocated state.

"Was-it-Ev-verajail?" asked Mr. Wegg, holding on.

"Not a proper jail, wot you and me would get committed to," returned his escort; "they giv' it the name, on accounts of Old Harmon living solitary there."

"And-why-did-they-callitharm-Ony?" asked Wegg.

"On accounts of his never agreeing with nobody. Like a speeches of chaff. Harmon's Jail; Harmony Jail. Working it round like."

"Doyouknow-Mist-Erboff-in?" asked Wegg.

"I should think so! Everybody do about here. Eddard knows him. (Keep yer hi on his ears.) Noddy Boffin, Eddard!"

The effect of the name was so very alarming, in respect of causing a temporary disappearance of Edward's head, casting his hind hoofs in the air, greatly accelerating the pace and increasing the jolting, that Mr. Wegg was fain to devote his attention exclusively to holding on, and to relinquish his desire of ascertaining whether this homage to Boffin was to be considered complimentary or the reverse.

Presently, Edward stopped at a gateway, and Wegg discreetly lost no time in slipping out at the back of the truck. The moment he was landed, his late driver, with a wave of the carrot, said, "Supper, Eddard!" and he, the hind hoofs, the truck, and Edward, all seemed to fly into the air together, in a kind of apotheosis.

Pushing the gate, which stood ajar, Wegg looked into an

inclosed space where certain tall dark mounds rose high against the sky, and where the pathway to the Bower was indicated, as the moonlight showed, between two lines of broken crockery set in ashes. A white figure advancing along this path proved to be nothing more ghostly than Mr. Boffin, easily attired for the pursuit of knowledge, in an undress garment of short white smock-frock. Having received his literary friend with great cordiality, he conducted him to the interior of the Bower and there presented him to Mrs. Boffin, — a stout lady of a rubicund and cheerful aspect, dressed (to Mr. Wegg's consternation) in a low evening-dress of sable satin, and a large black velvet hat and feathers.

"Mrs. Boffin, Wegg," said Boffin, "is a highflyer at Fashion. And her make is such, that she does it credit. As to myself, I ain't yet as Fash'nable as I may come to be. Henerietty, old lady, this is the gentleman that 's a going to decline and fall off the Rooshan Empire."

"And I am sure I hope it 'll do you both good," said Mrs. Boffin.

It was the queerest of rooms, fitted and furnished more like a luxurious amateur tap-room than anything else within the ken of Silas Wegg. There were two wooden settles by the fire, one on either side of it, with a corresponding table before each. On one of these tables the eight volumes were ranged flat, in a row, like a galvanic battery; on the other, certain squat case-bottles of inviting appearance seemed to stand on tiptoe to exchange glances with Mr. Wegg over a front row of tumblers and a basin of white sugar. On the hob, a kettle steamed; on the hearth, a cat reposed. Facing the fire between the settles, a sofa, a footstool, and a little table, formed a centre-piece devoted to Mrs. Boffin. They were garish in taste and colour, but were expensive articles of drawing-room furniture, that had a very odd look beside the settles and the flaring gaslight pendent from the ceiling. There was a flowery carpet on the floor; but instead of reaching to the fireside, its glowing vegetation stopped short at Mrs. Boffin's footstool, and gave place to a region of sand and sawdust. Mr. Wegg also noticed, with admiring eyes, that, while the flowery land displayed such hollow ornamentation as stuffed birds and waxen fruits under glass-shades, there were, in the territory where vegetation ceased, compensatory shelves on which the best part of a large pie and likewise of a

cold joint were plainly discernible among other solids. The room itself was large, though low; and the heavy frames of its old-fashioned windows, and the heavy beams in its crooked ceiling, seemed to indicate that it had once been a house of some mark standing alone in the country.

"Do you like it, Wegg?" asked Mr. Boffin, in his pouncing manner.

"I admire it greatly, sir," said Wegg. "Peculiar comfort at this fireside, sir."

"Do you understand it, Wegg?"

"Why, in a general way, sir," Mr. Wegg was beginning slowly and knowingly, with his head stuck on one side, as evasive people do begin, when the other cut him short: —

"You *don't* understand it, Wegg, and I'll explain it. These arrangements is made by mutual consent between Mrs. Boffin and me. Mrs. Boffin, as I've mentioned, is a highflyer at Fashion; at present I'm not. I don't go higher than comfort, and comfort of the sort that I'm equal to the enjyment of. Well then. Where would be the good of Mrs. Boffin and me quarrelling over it? We never did quarrel, before we come into Boffin's Bower as a property; why quarrel when we *have* come into Boffin's Bower as a property? So Mrs. Boffin, she keeps up her part of the room, in her way; I keep up my part of the room in mine. In consequence of which we have at once, Sociability (I should go melancholy mad without Mrs. Boffin), Fashion, and Comfort. If I get by degrees to be a highflyer at Fashion, then Mrs. Boffin will by degrees come for'arder. If Mrs. Boffin should ever be less of a dab at Fashion than she is at the present time, then Mrs. Boffin's carpet would go back'arder. If we should both continny as we are, why then *here* we are, and give us a kiss, old lady."

Mrs. Boffin, who, perpetually smiling, had approached and drawn her plump arm through her lord's, most willingly complied. Fashion, in the form of her black velvet hat and feathers, tried to prevent it; but got deservedly crushed in the endeavour.

"So now, Wegg," said Mr. Boffin, wiping his mouth with an air of much refreshment, "you begin to know us as we are. This is a charming spot, is the Bower, but you must get to appreciate it by degrees. It's a spot to find out the merits of, little by little, and a new 'un every day. There 's a serpentining

walk up each of the mounds, that gives you the yard and neighbourhood changing every moment. When you get to the top, there 's a view of the neighbouring premises, not to be surpassed. The premises of Mrs. Boffin's late father (Canine Provision Trade), you look down into, as if they was your own. And the top of the High Mound is crowned with a lattice-work Arbour, in which, if you don't read out loud many a book in the summer, ay, and as a friend, drop many a time into poetry too, it shan't be my fault. Now, what 'll you read on ? "

" Thank you, sir," returned Wegg, as if there were nothing new in his reading at all. " I generally do it on gin and water."

" Keeps the organ moist, does it, Wegg ? " asked Mr. Boffin, with innocent eagerness.

" N-no, sir," replied Wegg coolly, " I should hardly describe it so, sir. I should say, mellers it. Mellers it, is the word I should employ, Mr. Boffin."

His wooden conceit and craft kept exact pace with the delighted expectation of his victim. The visions rising before his mercenary mind, of the many ways in which this connection was to be turned to account, never obscured the foremost idea natural to a dull over-reaching man, that he must not make himself too cheap.

Mrs. Boffin's Fashion, as a less inexorable deity than the idol usually worshipped under that name, did not forbid her mixing for her literary guest, or asking if he found the result to his liking. On his returning a gracious answer and taking his place at the literary settle, Mr. Boffin began to compose himself as a listener, at the opposite settle, with exultant eyes.

" Sorry to deprive you of a pipe, Wegg," he said, filling his own, " but you can't do both together. Oh ! and another thing I forgot to name ! When you come in here of an evening, and look round you, and notice anything on a shelf that happens to catch your fancy, mention it."

Wegg, who had been going to put on his spectacles, immediately laid them down, with the sprightly observation : —

" You read my thoughts, sir. *Do* my eyes deceive me, or is that object up there a — a pie ? It can't be a pie."

" Yes, it 's a pie, Wegg," replied Mr. Boffin, with a glance of some little discomfiture at the Decline and Fall.

" *Have* I lost my smell for fruits, or is it a apple pie, sir ? " asked Wegg.

"It's a veal and ham pie," said Mr. Boffin.

"Is it indeed, sir? And it would be hard, sir, to name the pie that is a better pie than a weal and hammer," said Mr. Wegg, nodding his head emotionally.

"Have some, Wegg?"

"Thank you, Mr. Boffin, I think I will, at your invitation. I would n't at any other party's at the present juncture; but at yours, sir! — And meaty jelly too, especially when a little salt, which is the case where there 's ham, is mellering to the organ, is very mellering to the organ." Mr. Wegg did not say what organ, but spoke with a cheerful generality.

So the pie was brought down, and the worthy Mr. Boffin exercised his patience until Wegg, in the exercise of his knife and fork, had finished the dish; only profiting by the opportunity to inform Wegg that although it was not strictly Fashionable to keep the contents of a larder thus exposed to view, he (Mr. Boffin) considered it hospitable; for the reason, that instead of saying, in a comparatively unmeaning manner, to a visitor, "There are such and such edibles down stairs; will you have anything up?" you took the bold practical course of saying, "Cast your eye along the shelves, and if you see anything you like there, have it down."

And now, Mr. Wegg at length pushed away his plate and put on his spectacles, and Mr. Boffin lighted his pipe, and looked with beaming eyes into the opening world before him, and Mrs. Boffin reclined in a fashionable manner on her sofa; as one who would be part of the audience if she found she could, and would go to sleep if she found she could n't.

"Hem!" began Wegg. "This, Mr. Boffin and Lady, is the first chapter of the first wollume of the Decline and Fall off" — here he looked hard at the book, and stopped.

"What 's the matter, Wegg?"

"Why, it comes into my mind, do you know, sir," said Wegg with an air of insinuating frankness (having first again looked hard at the book), "that you made a little mistake this morning, which I had meant to set you right in, only something put it out of my head. I think you said Rooshan Empire, sir?"

"It is Rooshan; ain't it, Wegg?"

"No, sir. Roman. Roman."

"What 's the difference, Wegg?"

"The difference, sir?" Mr. Wegg was faltering and in danger of breaking down, when a bright thought flashed upon him. "The difference, sir? There you place me in a difficulty, Mr. Boffin. Suffice it to observe, that the difference is best postponed to some other occasion, when Mrs. Boffin does not honour us with her company. In Mrs. Boffin's presence, sir, we had better drop it."

Mr. Wegg thus came out of his disadvantage with quite a chivalrous air, and not only that, but by dint of repeating with a manly delicacy, "In Mrs. Boffin's presence, sir, we had better drop it!" turned the disadvantage on Boffin, who felt that he had committed himself in a very painful manner.

Then Mr. Wegg, in a dry, unflinching way, entered on his task; going straight across country at everything that came before him; taking all the hard words, biographical and geographical; getting rather shaken by Hadrian, Trajan, and the Antonines; stumbling at Polybius (pronounced Polly Beeious, and supposed by Mr. Boffin to be a Roman virgin, and by Mrs. Boffin to be responsible for that necessity of dropping it); heavily unseated by Titus Antoninus Pius; up again and galloping smoothly with Augustus; finally, getting over the ground well with Commodus, who, under the appellation of Commodious, was held by Mr. Boffin to have been quite unworthy of his English origin, and "not to have acted up to his name" in his government of the Roman people. With the death of this personage, Mr. Wegg terminated his first reading; long before which consummation, several total eclipses of Mrs. Boffin's candle behind her black velvet disc would have been very alarming, but for being regularly accompanied by a potent smell of burnt pens when her feathers took fire, which acted as a restorative and woke her. Mr. Wegg, having read on by rote and attached as few ideas as possible to the text, came out of the encounter fresh; but Mr. Boffin, who had soon laid down his unfinished pipe, and had ever since sat intently staring with his eyes and mind at the confounding enormities of the Romans, was so severely punished that he could hardly wish his literary friend Good night, and articulate "To-morrow."

"Commodious," gasped Mr. Boffin, staring at the moon, after letting Wegg out at the gate and fastening it: "Commodious fights in that wild-beast-show, seven hundred and thirty-five

times, in one character only! As if that was n't stunning enough, a hundred lions is turned into the same wild-beast-show all at once! As if that was n't stunning enough, Commodious, in another character, kills 'em all off in a hundred goes! As if that was n't stunning enough, Vittle-us (and well named too) eats six millions' worth, English money, in seven months! Wegg takes it easy, but upon-my-soul to a old bird like myself these are scarers. And even now that Commodious is strangled, I don't see a way to our bettering ourselves." Mr. Boffin added as he turned his pensive steps towards the Bower and shook his head, "I did n't think this morning there was half so many Scarers in Print. But I 'm in for it now!"

CHAPTER VI

CUT ADRIFT

THE Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, already mentioned as a tavern of a dropsical appearance, had long settled down into a state of hale infirmity. In its whole constitution it had not a straight floor, and hardly a straight line; but it had outlasted, and clearly would yet outlast, many a better-trimmed building, many a sprucer public-house. Externally, it was a narrow, lop-sided wooden jumble of corpulent windows, heaped one upon another as you might heap as many toppling oranges, with a crazy wooden verandah impending over the water; indeed the whole house, inclusive of the complaining flag-staff on the roof, impended over the water, but seemed to have got into the condition of a faint-hearted diver who had paused so long on the brink that he will never go in at all.

This description applies to the river-frontage of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters. The back of the establishment, though the chief entrance was there, so contracted that it merely represented, in its connection with the front, the handle of a flat-iron set upright on its broadest end. This handle stood at the bottom of a wilderness of court and alley: which wilderness pressed so hard and close upon the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters as to leave the hostelry not an inch of ground beyond its door. For this reason, in combination with the fact that the house was all but afloat at high water, when the Porters had a family wash, the linen subjected to that operation might usually be seen drying on lines stretched across the reception-rooms and bed-chambers.

The wood forming the chimney-pieces, beams, partitions, floors, and doors of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters seemed in its old age fraught with confused memories of its youth. In many places it had become gnarled and riven, according to the manner of old trees; knots started out of it; and here and there it seemed to twist itself into some likeness of boughs.

In this state of second childhood, it had an air of being in its own way garrulous about its early life. Not without reason was it often asserted by the regular frequenters of the Porters, that when the light shone full upon the grain of certain panels, and particularly upon an old corner cupboard of walnut-wood in the bar, you might trace little forests there, and tiny trees like the parent tree, in full umbrageous leaf.

The bar of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters was a bar to soften the human breast. The available space in it was not much larger than a hackney-coach; but no one could have wished the bar bigger, that space was so girt in by corpulent little casks, and by cordial-bottles radiant with fictitious grapes in bunches, and by lemons in nets, and by biscuits in baskets, and by the polite beer pulls that made low bows when customers were served with beer, and by the cheese in a snug corner, and by the landlady's own small table in a snugger corner near the fire, with the cloth everlastingly laid. This haven was divided from the rough world by a glass partition and a half-door, with a leaden sill upon it for the convenience of resting your liquor; but over this half-door the bar's snugness so gushed forth, that, albeit customers drank there standing, in a dark and draughty passage where they were shouldered by other customers passing in and out, they always appeared to drink under an enchanting delusion that they were in the bar itself.

For the rest, both the tap and parlour of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters gave upon the river, and had red curtains matching the noses of the regular customers, and were provided with comfortable fireside tin utensils, like models of sugar-loaf hats, made in that shape that they might, with their pointed ends, seek out for themselves glowing nooks in the depths of the red coals, when they mulled your ale, or heated for you those delectable drinks, Purl, Flip, and Dog's Nose. The first of these humming compounds was a specialty of the Porters, which, through an inscription on its door-posts, gently appealed to your feelings as, "The Early Purl House." For it would seem that Purl must always be taken early; though whether for any more distinctly stomachic reason than that, as the early bird catches the worm, so the early purl catches the customer, cannot here be resolved. It only remains to add that in the handle of the flat-iron, and opposite the bar, was a very little room like a three-cornered hat, into which no direct ray of sun,

moon, or star ever penetrated, but which was superstitiously regarded as a sanctuary replete with comfort and retirement by gaslight, and on the door of which was therefore painted its alluring name: Cosy.

Miss Potterson, sole proprietor and manager of the Fellowship-Porters, reigned supreme on her throne, the Bar, and a man must have drunk himself mad drunk indeed if he thought he could contest a point with her. Being known on her own authority as Miss Abbey Potterson, some waterside heads, which (like the water) were none of the clearest, harboured muddled notions that, because of her dignity and firmness, she was named after, or in some sort related to, the Abbey at Westminster. But Abbey was only short for Abigail, by which name Miss Potterson had been christened at Limehouse Church, some sixty and odd years before.

"Now, you mind, you Riderhood," said Miss Abbey Potterson, with emphatic forefinger over the half-door, "the Fellowships don't want you at all, and would rather by far have your room than your company; but if you were as welcome here as you are not, you should n't even then have another drop of drink here this night, after this present pint of beer. So make the most of it."

"But you know, Miss Potterson," this was suggested very meekly though, "if I behave myself, you can't help serving me, miss."

"*Can't* I!" said Abbey, with infinite expression.

"No, Miss Potterson; because, you see, the law —"

"*I* am the law here, my man," returned Miss Abbey, "and I 'll soon convince you of that, if you doubt it at all."

"I never said I did doubt it at all, Miss Abbey."

"So much the better for you."

Abbey the supreme threw the customer's halfpence into the till, and, seating herself in her fireside-chair, resumed the newspaper she had been reading. She was a tall, upright, well-favoured woman, though severe of countenance, and had more of the air of a schoolmistress than mistress of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters. The man on the other side of the half-door was a waterside-man with a squinting leer, and he eyed her as if he were one of her pupils in disgrace.

"You 're cruel hard upon me, Miss Potterson."

Miss Potterson read her newspaper with contracted brows, and took no notice until he whispered: —

"Miss Potterson! Ma'am! Might I have half a word with you?"

Deigning then to turn her eyes sideways towards the suppliant, Miss Potterson beheld him knuckling his low forehead, and ducking at her with his head, as if he were asking leave to fling himself head foremost over the half-door and alight on his feet in the bar.

"Well?" said Miss Potterson, with a manner as short as she herself was long, "say your half word. Bring it out."

"Miss Potterson! Ma'am! Would you 'sxcuse me taking the liberty of asking, is it my character that you take objections to?"

"Certainly," said Miss Potterson.

"Is that you're afraid of —"

"I am not afraid of *you*," interposed Miss Potterson, "if you mean that."

"But I humbly don't mean that, Miss Abbey."

"Then what do you mean?"

"You really are so cruel hard upon me! What I was going to make inquiries was no more than, might you have any apprehensions — leastway beliefs or suppositions — that the company's property might n't be altogether to be considered safe, if I used the house too regular?"

"What do you want to know for?"

"Well, Miss Abbey, respectfully meaning no offence to you, it would be some satisfaction to a man's mind to understand why the Fellowship-Porters is not to be free to such as me, and is to be free to such as Gaffer."

The face of the hostess darkened with some shadow of perplexity, as she replied: "Gaffer has never been where you have been."

"Signifying in Quod, miss? Perhaps not. But he may have merited it. He may be suspected of far worse than ever I was."

"Who suspects him?"

"Many, perhaps. One, beyond all doubts. I do."

"*You* are not much" said Miss Abbey Potterson, knitting her brows again with disdain.

"But I was his pardner. Mind you, Miss Abbey, I was his

At the B

pardner. As such I know more of the ins and outs of him than any person living does. Notice this! I am the man that was his pardner, and I am the man that suspects him."

"Then," suggested Miss Abbey, though with a deeper shade of perplexity than before, "you criminate yourself."

"No, I don't, Miss Abbey. For how does it stand? It stands this way. When I was his pardner, I could n't never give him satisfaction. Why could n't I never give him satisfaction? Because my luck was bad; because I could n't find many enough of 'em. How was his luck? Always good. Notice this! Always good! Ah! There 's a many games, Miss Abbey, in which there 's chance, but there 's a many others in which there 's skill too, mixed along with it."

"That Gaffer has a skill in finding what he finds, who doubts, man?" asked Miss Abbey.

"A skill in purwiding what he finds, perhaps," said Riderhood, shaking his evil head.

Miss Abbey knitted her brow at him as he darkly leered at her.

"If you 're out upon the river pretty nigh every tide, and if you want to find a man or woman in the river, you 'll greatly help your luck, Miss Abbey, by knocking a man or woman on the head and pitching 'em in."

"Gracious Lud!" was the involuntary exclamation of Miss Potterson.

"Mind you!" returned the other, stretching forward over the half door to throw his words into the bar; for his voice was as if the head of his boat's mop were down his throat; "I say so, Miss Abbey! And mind you! I 'll follow him up, Miss Abbey! And mind you! I 'll bring him to book at last, if it 's twenty year hence, I will! Who 's he, to be favoured along of his daughter? Ain't I got a daughter of my own!"

With that flourish, and seeming to have talked himself rather more drunk and much more ferocious than he had begun by being, Mr. Riderhood took up his pint pot and swaggered off to the tap-room.

Gaffer was not there, but a pretty strong muster of Miss Abbey's pupils were, who exhibited, when occasion required, the greatest docility. On the clock's striking ten, and Miss Abbey's appearing at the door, and addressing a certain person in a faded scarlet jacket, with "George Jones, your time 's up! I told your wife you should be punctual," Jones submissively

rose, gave the company good night, and retired. At half-past ten, on Miss Abbey's looking in again, and saying, "William Williams, Bob Glamour, and Jonathan, you are all due," Williams, Bob, and Jonathan with similar meekness took their leave and evaporated. Greater wonder than these, when a bottle-nosed person in a glazed hat had after some considerable hesitation ordered another glass of gin and water of the attendant potboy, and when Miss Abbey, instead of sending it, appeared in person, saying, "Captain Joey, you have had as much as will do you good," not only did the captain feebly rub his knees and contemplate the fire without offering a word of protest, but the rest of the company murmured, "Ay, ay, Captain! Miss Abbey's right; you be guided by Miss Abbey, Captain." Nor was Miss Abbey's vigilance in anywise abated by this submission, but rather sharpened; for looking round on the deferential faces of her school, and descrying two other young persons in need of admonition, she thus bestowed it: "Tom Tootle, it's time for a young fellow who's going to be married next month, to be at home and asleep. And you need n't nudge him, Mr. Jack Mullins, for I know your work begins early to-morrow, and I say the same to you. So come! Good night, like good lads!" Upon which the blushing Tootle looked to Mullins, and the blushing Mullins looked to Tootle, on the question who should rise first, and finally both rose together and went out on the broad grin, followed by Miss Abbey; in whose presence the company did not take the liberty of grinning likewise.

In such an establishment, the white-aproned potboy, with his shirt-sleeves arranged in a tight roll on each bare shoulder, was a mere hint of the possibility of physical force, thrown out as a matter of state and form. Exactly at the closing hour, all the guests who were left filed out in the best order: Miss Abbey standing at the half door of the bar, to hold a ceremony of review and dismissal. All wished Miss Abbey good night, and Miss Abbey wished good night to all, except Riderhood. The sapient potboy, looking on officially, then had the conviction borne in upon his soul, that the man was evermore outcast and excommunicate from the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters.

"You Bob Gliddery," said Miss Abbey to this potboy, "run round to Hexam's and tell his daughter Lizzie that I want to speak to her."

With exemplary swiftness Bob Gliddery departed, and re-

turned. Lizzie, following him, arrived as one of the two female domestics of the Fellowship-Porters arranged, on the snug little table by the bar fire, Miss Potterson's supper of hot sausages and mashed potatoes.

"Come in and sit ye down, girl," said Miss Abbey. "Can you eat a bit?"

"No, thank you, miss. I have had my supper."

"I have had mine, too, I think," said Miss Abbey, pushing away the untasted dish, "and more than enough of it. I am put out, Lizzie."

"I am very sorry for it, miss."

"Then why in the name of Goodness," quoth Miss Abbey, sharply, "do you do it?"

"*I* do it, miss!"

"There, there. Don't look astonished. I ought to have begun with a word of explanation, but it's my way to make short cuts at things. I always was a pepperer. You Bob Gliddery, there, put the chain upon the door and get ye down to your supper."

With an alacrity that seemed no less referable to the pepperer fact than to the supper fact, Bob obeyed, and his boots were heard descending towards the bed of the river.

"Lizzie Hexam, Lizzie Hexam," then began Miss Potterson, "how often have I held out to you the opportunity of getting clear of your father, and doing well?"

"Very often, miss."

"Very often? Yes! And I might as well have spoken to the iron funnel of the strongest sea-going steamer that passes the Fellowship-Porters."

"No, miss," Lizzie pleaded; "because that would not be thankful, and I am."

"I vow and declare I am half ashamed of myself for taking such an interest in you," said Miss Abbey pettishly, "for I don't believe I should do it if you were not good looking. Why ain't you ugly?"

Lizzie merely answered this difficult question with an apologetic glance.

"However, you ain't," resumed Miss Potterson, "so it's no use going into that. I must take you as I find you. Which indeed is what I've done. And you mean to say you are still obstinate."

"Not obstinate, miss, I hope."

"Firm (I suppose you call it) then?"

"Yes, miss. Fixed like."

"Never was an obstinate person yet, who would own to the word!" remarked Miss Potterson, rubbing her vexed nose; "I'm sure I would, if I was obstinate; but I am a pepperer, which is different. Lizzie Hexam, Lizzie Hexam, think again. Do you know the worst of your father?"

"Do I know the worst of father!" she repeated, opening her eyes.

"Do you know the suspicions to which your father makes himself liable? Do you know the suspicions that are actually about against him?"

The consciousness of what he habitually did oppressed the girl heavily, and she slowly cast down her eyes.

"Say, Lizzie. Do you know?" urged Miss Abbey.

"Please to tell me what the suspicions are, miss —" she asked after a silence, with her eyes upon the ground.

"It's not an easy thing to tell a daughter, but it must be told. It is thought by some, then, that your father helps to their death a few of those that he finds dead."

The relief of hearing what she felt sure was a false suspicion in place of the expected real and true one, so lightened Lizzie's breast for the moment, that Miss Abbey was amazed at her demeanour. She raised her eyes quickly, shook her head, and, in a kind of triumph, almost laughed.

"They little know father who talk like that!"

("She takes it," thought Miss Abbey, "very quietly. She takes it with extraordinary quietness!")

"And perhaps," said Lizzie, as a recollection flashed upon her, "it is some one who has a grudge against father; some one who has threatened father! Is it Riderhood, miss?"

"Well; yes, it is."

"Yes! He was father's partner, and father broke with him, and now he revenges himself. Father broke with him when I was by, and he was very angry at it. And besides, Miss Abbey! — Will you never, without strong reason, let pass your lips what I am going to say?"

She bent forward to say it in a whisper.

"I promise," said Miss Abbey.

"It was on the night when the Harmon murder was found

out, through father, just above bridge. And just below bridge, as we were sculling home, Riderhood crept out of the dark in his boat. And many and many times afterwards, when such great pains were taken to come to the bottom of the crime, and it never could be come near, I thought in my own thoughts, could Riderhood himself have done the murder, and did he purposely let father find the body? It seemed a'most wicked and cruel to so much as think such a thing; but now that he tries to throw it upon father, I go back to it as if it was a truth. Can it be a truth, that was put into mind by the dead?"

She asked this question rather of the fire than of the hostess of the Fellowship-Porters, and looked round the little bar with troubled eyes.

But Miss Potterson, as a ready schoolmistress accustomed to bring her pupils to book, set the matter in a light that was essentially of this world.

"You poor deluded girl," she said, "don't you see that you can't open your mind to particular suspicions of one of the two, without opening your mind to general suspicions of the other? They had worked together. Their goings-on had been going on for some time. Even granting that it was as you have had in your thoughts, what the two had done together would come familiar to the mind of one."

"You don't know father, miss, when you talk like that. Indeed, indeed, you don't know father."

"Lizzie, Lizzie," said Miss Potterson. "Leave him. You need n't break with him altogether, but leave him. Do well away from him; not because of what I have told you to-night — we 'll pass no judgment upon that, and we 'll hope it may not be — but because of what I have urged on you, before. No matter whether it 's owing to your good looks or not, I like you and I want to serve you. Lizzie, come under my direction. Don't fling yourself away, my girl, but be persuaded into being respectable and happy."

In the sound good feeling and good sense of her entreaty, Miss Abbey had softened into a soothing tone, and had even drawn her arm round the girl's waist. But she only replied, "Thank you, thank you! I can't. I won't. I must not think of it. The harder father is borne upon, the more he needs me to lean on."

And then Miss Abbey, who, like all hard people when they

do soften, felt that there was considerable compensation owing to her, underwent reaction and became frigid.

"I have done what I can," she said, "and you must go your way. You make your bed, and you must lie on it. But tell your father one thing: he must not come here any more."

"Oh, miss, will you forbid him the house where I know he's safe?"

"The Fellowships," returned Miss Abbey, "has itself to look to, as well as others. It has been hard work to establish order here, and make the Fellowships what it is, and it is daily and nightly hard work to keep it so. The Fellowships must not have a taint upon it that may give it a bad name. I forbid the house to Riderhood, and I forbid the house to Gaffer. I forbid both, equally. I find from Riderhood and you together, that there are suspicions against both men, and I'm not going to take upon myself to decide betwixt them. They are both tarred with a dirty brush, and I can't have the Fellowships tarred with the same brush. That's all *I* know."

"Good night, miss!" said Lizzie Hexam sorrowfully.

"Hah! — Good night!" returned Miss Abbey, with a shake of her head.

"Believe me, Miss Abbey, I am truly grateful all the same."

"I can believe a good deal," returned the stately Abbey, "so I'll try to believe that too, Lizzie."

No supper did Miss Potterson take that night, and only half her usual tumbler of hot Port Negus. And the female domestics — two robust sisters, with staring black eyes, shining flat red faces, blunt noses, and strong black curls like dolls — interchanged the sentiment that Missis had had her hair combed the wrong way by somebody. And the potboy afterwards remarked, that he had n't been "so rattled to bed," since his mother had systematically accelerated his retirement to rest with a poker.

The chaining of the door behind her, as she went forth, disenchanted Lizzie Hexam of that first relief she had felt. The night was black and shrill, the river-side wilderness was melancholy, and there was a sound of casting-out, in the rattling of the iron-links, and the grating of the bolts and staples under Miss Abbey's hand. As she came beneath the lowering sky, a sense of being involved in a murky shade of Murder dropped upon her; and as the tidal swell of the river broke at her feet without her seeing how it gathered, so her thoughts

startled her by rushing out of an unseen void and striking at her heart.

Of her father's being groundlessly suspected, she felt sure. Sure. Sure. And yet, repeat the word inwardly as often as she would, the attempt to reason out and prove that she was sure always came after it and failed. Riderhood had done the deed, and entrapped her father. Riderhood had not done the deed, but had resolved in his malice to turn against her father the appearances that were ready to his hand to distort. Equally and swiftly upon either putting of the case, followed the frightful possibility that her father, being innocent, yet might come to be believed guilty. She had heard of people suffering Death for bloodshed of which they were afterwards proved pure, and those ill-fated persons were not, first, in that dangerous wrong in which her father stood. Then at the best, the beginning of his being set apart, whispered against, and avoided, was a certain fact. It dated from that very night. And as the great black river with its dreary shores was soon lost to her view in the gloom, so she stood on the river's brink unable to see into the vast blank misery of a life suspected, and fallen away from by good and bad, but knowing that it lay there dim before her, stretching away to the great ocean, Death.

One thing only was clear to the girl's mind. Accustomed from her very babyhood promptly to do the thing that could be done — whether to keep out weather, to ward off cold, to postpone hunger, or what not — she started out of her meditation, and ran home.

The room was quiet, and the lamp burnt on the table. In the bunk in the corner her brother lay asleep. She bent over him softly, kissed him, and came to the table.

"By the time of Miss Abbey's closing, and by the run of the tide, it must be one. Tide 's running up. Father, at Chiswick, would n't think of coming down till after the turn, and that 's at half after four. I 'll call Charley at six. I shall hear the church clocks strike, as I sit here."

Very quietly, she placed a chair before the scanty fire, and sat down in it, drawing her shawl about her.

"Charley's hollow down by the flare is not there now. Poor Charley!"

The clock struck two, and the clock struck three, and the clock struck four, and she remained there, with a woman's

patience and her own purpose. When the morning was well on between four and five, she slipped off her shoes (that her going about might not wake Charley), trimmed the fire sparingly, put water on to boil, and set the table for breakfast. Then she went up the ladder, lamp in hand, and came down again, and glided about and about, making a little bundle. Lastly, from her pocket, and from the chimney-piece, and from an inverted basin on the highest shelf, she brought halfpence, a few sixpences, fewer shillings, and fell to laboriously and noiselessly counting them, and setting aside one little heap. She was still so engaged, when she was startled by: —

"Hal-loa!" From her brother, sitting up in bed.

"You made me jump, Charley."

"Jump! Didn't you make *me* jump, when I opened my eyes a moment ago, and saw you sitting there like the ghost of a girl-miser, in the dead of the night?"

"It's not the dead of the night, Charley. It's nigh six in the morning."

"Is it though? But what are you up to, Liz?"

"Still telling your fortune, Charley."

"It seems to be a precious small one, if that's it," said the boy. "What are you putting that little pile of money by itself for?"

"For you, Charley."

"What do you mean?"

"Get out of bed, Charley, and get washed and dressed, and then I'll tell you."

Her composed manner, and her low voice, always had an influence over him. His head was soon in a basin of water, and out of it again, and staring at her through a storm of towelling.

"I never," towelling at himself as if he were his bitterest enemy, "saw such a girl as you are. What *is* the move, Liz?"

"Are you almost ready for breakfast, Charley?"

"You can pour it out. Hal-loa! I say? And a bundle?"

"And a bundle, Charley."

"You don't mean it's for me, too?"

"Yes, Charley; I do indeed."

More serious of face, and more slow of action, than he had been, the boy completed his dressing, and came and sat down

at the little breakfast-table, with his eyes amazedly directed to her face.

"You see, Charley dear, I have made up my mind that this is the right time for your going away from us. Over and above all the blessed change of by and by, you 'll be much happier, and do much better, even so soon as next month. Even so soon as next week."

"How do you know I shall ? "

"I don't quite know how, Charley, but I do." In spite of her unchanged manner of speaking, and her unchanged appearance of composure, she scarcely trusted herself to look at him, but kept her eyes employed on the cutting and buttering of his bread, and on the mixing of his tea, and other such little preparations. "You must leave father to me, Charley — I will do what I can with him — but you must go."

"You don't stand upon ceremony, I think," grumbled the boy, throwing his bread and butter about, in an ill-humour.

She made no answer.

"I tell you what," said the boy, then, bursting out into an angry whimpering, "you 're a selfish jade, and you think there 's not enough for three of us, and you want to get rid of me."

"If you believe so, Charley, — yes, then I believe too that I am a selfish jade, and that I think there 's not enough for three of us, and that I want to get rid of you."

It was only when the boy rushed at her, and threw his arms round her neck, that she lost her self-restraint. But she lost it then, and wept over him.

"Don't cry, don't cry! I am satisfied to go, Liz; I am satisfied to go. I know you send me away for my good."

"O Charley, Charley, Heaven above us knows I do!"

"Yes, yes. Don't mind what I said. Don't remember it. Kiss me."

After a silence, she loosed him, to dry her eyes and regain her strong, quiet influence.

"Now listen, Charley dear. We both know it must be done, and I alone know there is good reason for its being done at once. Go straight to the school, and say that you and I agreed upon it — that we can't overcome father's opposition — that father will never trouble them, but will never take you back. You are a credit to the school, and you will be a greater

credit to it yet, and they will help you to get a living. Show what clothes you have brought, and what money, and say that I will send some more money. If I can get some in no other way, I will ask a little help of those two gentlemen who came here that night."

"I say!" cried her brother quickly. "Don't you have it of that chap that took hold of me by the chin! Don't you have it of that Wrayburn one!"

Perhaps a slight additional tinge of red flashed up into her face and brow, as with a nod she laid a hand upon his lips to keep him silently attentive.

"And above all things mind this, Charley! Be sure you always speak well of father. Be sure you always give father his full due. You can't deny that because father has no learning himself he is set against it in you; but favour nothing else against him, and be sure you say — as you know — that your sister is devoted to him. And if you should ever happen to hear anything said against father that is new to you, it will not be true. Remember, Charley! It will not be true."

The boy looked at her with some doubt and surprise, but she went on again without heeding it.

"Above all things remember! It will not be true. I have nothing more to say, Charley dear, except, be good, and get learning, and only think of some things in the old life here, as if you had dreamed them in a dream last night. Good-bye, my Darling!"

Though so young, she infused into these parting words a love that was far more like a mother's than a sister's, and before which the boy was quite bowed down. After holding her to his breast with a passionate cry, he took up his bundle and darted out at the door, with an arm across his eyes.

The white face of the winter day came sluggishly on, veiled in a frosty mist; and the shadowy ships in the river slowly changed to black substances; and the sun, blood-red on the eastern marshes behind dark masts and yards, seemed filled with the ruins of a forest it had set on fire. Lizzie, looking for her father, saw him coming, and stood upon the causeway that he might see her.

He had nothing with him but his boat, and came on apace. A knot of those amphibious human creatures, who appear to have some mysterious power of extracting a subsistence out of tidal

water by looking at it, were gathered together about the causeway. As her father's boat grounded, they became contemplative of the mud and dispersed themselves. She saw that the mute avoidance had begun.

Gaffer saw it too, in so far as that he was moved, when he set foot on shore, to stare around him. But he promptly set to work to haul up his boat, and make her fast, and take the sculls and rudder and rope out of her. Carrying these with Lizzie's aid, he passed up to his dwelling.

"Sit close to the fire, father dear, while I cook your breakfast. It 's all ready for cooking, and only been waiting for you. You must be frozen."

"Well, Lizzie, I ain't of a glow; that 's certain. And my hands seemed nailed through to the sculls. See how dead they are!" Something suggestive in their colour, and perhaps in her face, struck him as he held them up; he turned his shoulder and held them down to the fire.

"You were not out in the perishing night, I hope, father?"

"No, my dear. Lay aboard a barge, by a blazing coal-fire. — Where 's that boy?"

"There 's a drop of brandy for your tea, father, if you 'll put it in while I turn this bit of meat. If the river was to get frozen, there would be a deal of distress; would n't there, father?"

"Ah! there 's always enough of that," said Gaffer, dropping the liquor into his cup from a squat black bottle, and dropping it slowly that it might seem more; "distress is for ever a going about, like sut in the air — Ain't that boy up yet?"

"The meat 's ready now, father. Eat it while it 's hot and comfortable. After you have finished, we 'll turn round to the fire and talk."

But he perceived that he was evaded, and, having thrown a hasty angry glance towards the bunk, plucked at a corner of her apron and asked: —

"What 's gone with that boy?"

"Father, if you 'll begin your breakfast, I 'll sit by and tell you."

He looked at her, stirred his tea and took two or three gulps, then cut at his piece of hot steak with his case-knife, and said, eating: —

"Now then. What 's gone with that boy?"

"Don't be angry, dear. It seems, father, that he has quite a gift of learning."

"Unnat'ral young beggar!" said the parent, shaking his knife in the air.

"— And that having this gift, and not being equally good at other things, he has made shift to get some schooling."

"Unnat'ral young beggar!" said the parent again, with his former action.

"— And that knowing you have nothing to spare, father, and not wishing to be a burden on you, he gradually made up his mind to go seek his fortune out of learning. He went away this morning, father, and he cried very much at going, and he hoped you would forgive him."

"Let him never come a nigh me to ask me my forgiveness," said the father, again emphasising his words with the knife. "Let him never come within sight of my eyes, nor yet within reach of my arm. His own father ain't good enough for him. He's disowned his own father. His own father therefore disowns him for ever and ever, as a unnat'ral young beggar."

He had pushed away his plate. With the natural need of a strong, rough man in anger, to do something forcible, he now clutched his knife overhand, and struck downward with it at the end of every succeeding sentence. As he would have struck with his own clenched fist if there had chanced to be nothing in it.

"He's welcome to go. He's more welcome to go than to stay. But let him never come back. Let him never put his head inside that door. And let you never speak a word more in his favour, or you'll disown your own father likewise, and what your father says of him he'll have to come to say of you. Now I see why them men yonder held aloof from me. They says to one another, 'Here comes the man as ain't good enough for his own son!' Lizzie — !"

But she stopped him with a cry. Looking at her he saw her, with a face quite strange to him, shrinking back against the wall with her hands before her eyes.

"Father, don't! I can't bear to see you striking with it. Put it down!"

He looked at the knife; but in his astonishment still held it.

"Father, it's too horrible. Oh, put it down, put it down!"

Confounded by her appearance and exclamation, he tossed it away, and stood up with his open hands held out before him.

"What 's come to you, Liz? Can you think I would strike at you with a knife?"

"No, father, no; you would never hurt me."

"What should I hurt?"

"Nothing, dear father. On my knees, I am certain, in my heart and soul I am certain, nothing! But it was too dreadful to bear; for it looked —" her hands covering her face again, "Oh, it looked —".

"What did it look like?"

The recollection of his murderous figure, combining with her trial of last night, and her trial of the morning, caused her to drop at his feet, without having answered.

He had never seen her so before. He raised her with the utmost tenderness, calling her the best of daughters, and "my poor pretty creetur," and laid her head upon his knee, and tried to restore her. But failing, he laid her head gently down again, got a pillow and placed it under her dark hair, and sought on the table for a spoonful of brandy. There being none left, he hurriedly caught up the empty bottle, and ran out at the door.

He returned as hurriedly as he had gone, with the bottle still empty. He kneeled down by her, took her head on his arm, and moistened her lips with a little water into which he dipped his fingers: saying, fiercely, as he looked around, now over this shoulder, now over that: —

"Have we got a pest in the house? Is there summ'at deadly sticking to my clothes? What 's let loose upon us? Who loosed it?"

CHAPTER VII

MR. WEGG LOOKS AFTER HIMSELF

SILAS WEGG, being on his road to the Roman Empire, approaches it by way of Clerkenwell. The time is early in the evening; the weather moist and raw. Mr. Wegg finds leisure to make a little circuit, by reason that he folds his screen early, now that he combines another source of income with it, and also that he feels it due to himself to be anxiously expected at the Bower. "Boffin will get all the eagerer for waiting a bit," says Silas, screwing up, as he stumps along, first his right eye, and then his left. Which is something superfluous in him, for Nature has already screwed both pretty tight.

"If I get on with him as I expect to get on," Silas pursues, stumping and meditating, "it would n't become me to leave it here. It would n't be respectable." Animated by this reflection, he stumps faster, and looks a long way before him, as a man with an ambitious project in abeyance often will do.

Aware of a working-jeweller population taking sanctuary about the church in Clerkenwell, Mr. Wegg is conscious of an interest in, and a respect for, the neighbourhood. But his sensations in this regard halt as to their strict morality, as he halts in his gate; for they suggest the delights of a coat of invisibility in which to walk off safely with the precious stones and watch-cases, but stop short of any compunction for the people who would lose the same.

Not, however, towards the "shops" where cunning artificers work in pearls and diamonds and gold and silver, making their hands so rich that the enriched water in which they wash them is bought for the refiners; — not towards these does Mr. Wegg stump, but towards the poorer shops of small retail traders in commodities to eat and drink and keep folks warm, and of Italian frame-makers, and of barbers, and of brokers, and of dealers in dogs and singing-birds. From these, in a narrow and a dirty street devoted to such callings, Mr. Wegg selects one

dark shop window with a tallow candle dimly burning in it, surrounded by a muddle of objects vaguely resembling pieces of leather and dry stick, but among which nothing is resolvable into anything distinct, save the candle itself in its old tin candlestick, and two preserved frogs fighting a small-sword duel. Stumping with fresh vigour, he goes in at the dark greasy entry, pushes a little greasy dark reluctant side-door, and follows the door into the little dark greasy shop. It is so dark that nothing can be made out in it, over a little counter, but another tallow candle in another old tin candlestick, close to the face of a man stooping low in a chair.

Mr. Wegg nods to the face, "Good evening."

The face looking up is a sallow face with weak eyes, surmounted by a tangle of reddish-dusty hair. The owner of the face has no cravat on, and has opened his tumbled shirt-collar to work with the more ease. For the same reason he has no coat on: only a loose waistcoat over his yellow linen. His eyes are like the overtried eyes of an engraver, but he is not that; his expression and stoop are like those of a shoemaker, but he is not that.

"Good evening, Mr. Venus. Don't you remember?"

With slowly dawning remembrance, Mr. Venus rises, and holds his candle over the little counter, and holds it down towards the legs, natural and artificial, of Mr. Wegg.

"To be *sure!*" he says then. "How do you do?"

"Wegg, you know," that gentleman explains.

"Yes, yes," says the other. "Hospital amputation?"

"Just so," says Mr. Wegg.

"Yes, yes," quoth Venus. "How do you do? Sit down by the fire, and warm your — your other one."

The little counter being so short a counter that it leaves the fireplace, which would have been behind it if it had been longer, accessible, Mr. Wegg sits down on a box in front of the fire, and inhales a warm and comfortable smell which is not the smell of the shop. "For that," Mr. Wegg inwardly decides, as he takes a corrective sniff or two, "is musty, leathery, feathery, cellary, gluey, gummy, and," with another sniff, "as it might be, strong of old pairs of bellows."

"My tea is drawing, and my muffin is on the hob, Mr. Wegg; will you partake?"

It being one of Mr. Wegg's guiding rules in life always to partake, he says he will. But the little shop is so excessively

dark, is stuck so full of black shelves and brackets and nooks and corners, that he sees Mr. Venus's cup and saucer only because it is close under the candle, and does not see from what mysterious recess Mr. Venus produces another for himself, until it is under his nose. Concurrently, Wegg perceives a pretty little dead bird lying on the counter, with its head drooping on one side against the rim of Mr. Venus's saucer, and a long stiff wire piercing its breast. As if it were Cock Robin, the hero of the ballad, and Mr. Venus were the sparrow with his bow and arrow, and Mr. Wegg were the fly with his little eye.

Mr. Venus dives and produces another muffin, yet untoasted; taking the arrow out of the breast of Cock Robin, he proceeds to toast it on the end of that cruel instrument. When it is brown, he dives again and produces butter, with which he completes his work.

Mr. Wegg, as an artful man who is sure of his supper by and by, presses muffin on his host to soothe him into a compliant state of mind, or, as one might say, to grease his works. As the muffins disappear, little by little, the black shelves and nooks and corners begin to appear, and Mr. Wegg gradually acquires an imperfect notion that over against him on the chimney-piece is a Hindoo baby in a bottle, curved up with his big head tucked under him, as though he would instantly throw a summersault if the bottle were large enough.

When he deems Mr. Venus's wheels sufficiently lubricated, Mr. Wegg approaches his object by asking, as he lightly taps his hands together, to express an undesigning frame of mind: —

"And how have I been going on, this long time, Mr. Venus?"

"Very bad," says Mr. Venus uncompromisingly.

"What? Am I still at home?" asks Wegg, with an air of surprise.

"Always at home."

This would seem to be secretly agreeable to Wegg, but he veils his feelings and observes, "Strange. To what do you attribute it?"

"I don't know," replies Venus, who is a haggard, melancholy man, speaking in a weak voice of querulous complaint, "to what to attribute it, Mr. Wegg. I can't work you into a miscellaneous one, nohow. Do what I will, you can't be got to fit. Anybody with a passable knowledge would pick you out at a look, and say, — 'No go! Don't match!'"

"Well, but hang it, Mr. Venus," Wegg expostulates with some little irritation, "that can't be personal and peculiar in *me*. It must often happen with miscellaneous ones."

"With ribs (I grant you) always. But not else. When I prepare a miscellaneous one, I know beforehand that I can't keep to nature, and be miscellaneous with ribs, because every man has his own ribs, and no other man's will go with them; but elseways I can be miscellaneous. I have just sent home a Beauty — a perfect Beauty — to a school of art. One leg Belgian, one leg English, and the pickings of eight other people in it. Talk of not being qualified to be miscellaneous! By rights you *ought* to be, Mr. Wegg."

Silas looks as hard at his one leg as he can in the dim light, and after a pause sulkily opines "that it must be the fault of the other people. Or how do you mean to say it comes about?" he demands impatiently.

"I don't know how it comes about. Stand up a minute. Hold the light." Mr. Venus takes from a corner by his chair the bones of a leg and foot, beautifully pure, and put together with exquisite neatness. These he compares with Mr. Wegg's leg; that gentleman looking on, as if he were being measured for a riding-boot. "No, I don't know how it is, but so it is. You have got a twist in that bone, to the best of my belief. *I* never saw the likes of you."

Mr. Wegg having looked distrustfully at his own limb, and suspiciously at the pattern with which it has been compared, makes the point: —

"I 'll bet a pound that ain't an English one!"

"An easy wager, when we run so much into foreign! No, it belongs to that French gentleman."

As he nods towards a point of darkness behind Mr. Wegg, the latter, with a slight start, looks round for "that French gentleman," whom he at length descries to be represented (in a very workmanlike manner) by his ribs only, standing on a shelf in another corner, like a piece of armour or a pair of stays.

"Oh!" says Mr. Wegg, with a sort of sense of being introduced. "I dare say you were all right enough in your own country, but I hope no objections will be taken to my saying, that the Frenchman was never yet born as I should wish to match."

At this moment the greasy door is violently pushed inward, and a boy follows it, who says, after having let it slam: —

"Come for the stuffed canary."

"It 's three and ninepence," returns Venus; "have you got the money?"

The boy produces four shillings. Mr. Venus, always in exceedingly low spirits and making whimpering sounds, peers about for the stuffed canary. On his taking the candle to assist his search, Mr. Wegg observes that he has a convenient little shelf near his knees, exclusively appropriated to skeleton hands, which have very much the appearance of wanting to lay hold of him. From these Mr. Venus rescues the canary in a glass case, and shows it to the boy.

"There!" he whispers. "There 's animation! On a twig, making up his mind to hop! Take care of him; he 's a lovely specimen. — And three is four."

The boy gathers up his change and has pulled the door open by a leather strap nailed to it for the purpose, when Venus cries out: —

"Stop him! Come back, you young villain! You 've got a tooth among them halfpence."

"How was I to know I 'd got it? You giv' it me. I don't want none of your teeth; I 've got enough of my own." So the boy pipes, as he selects it from his change, and throws it on the counter.

"Don't sauce *me*, in the wicious pride of your youth," Mr. Venus retorts pathetically. "Don't hit *me*, because you see I 'm down. I 'm low enough without that. It dropped into the till, I suppose. They drop into everything. There was two in the coffee-pot at breakfast-time. Molars."

"Very well, then," argues the boy, "what do you call names for?"

To which Mr. Venus only replies, shaking his shock of dusty hair, and winking his weak eyes, "Don't sauce *me*, in the wicious pride of your youth; don't hit *me*, because you see I 'm down. You 've no idea how small you 'd come out, if I had the articulating of you."

This consideration seems to have its effect on the boy, for he goes out grumbling.

"Oh, dear me, dear me!" sighs Mr. Venus heavily, snuffing the candle, "the world that appeared so flowery has ceased to blow! You 're casting your eye round the shop, Mr. Wegg. Let me show you a light. My working bench. My young

man's bench. A Wice. Tools. Bones, warious. Skulls, warious. Preserved Indian baby. African ditto. Bottled preparations, warious. Everything within reach of your hand, in good preservation. The mouldy ones atop. What's in those hampers over them again, I don't quite remember. Say, human warious. Cats. Articulated English baby. Dogs. Ducks. Glass eyes, warious. Mummied bird. Dried cuticle, warious. Oh, dear me! That's the general panoramic view."

Having so held and waved the candle as that all these heterogeneous objects seemed to come forward obediently when they were named, and then retire again, Mr. Venus despondently repeats, "Oh, dear me, dear me!" resumes his seat, and with drooping despondency upon him, falls to pouring himself out more tea.

"Where am I?" asks Mr. Wegg.

"You 're somewhere in the back shop across the yard, sir; and speaking quite candidly, I wish I'd never bought you of the Hospital Porter."

"Now, look here, what did you give for me?"

"Well," replies Venus, blowing his tea, — his head and face peering out of the darkness, over the smoke of it, as if he were modernising the old original rise in his family, — "you were one of a warious lot, and I don't know."

Silas puts his point in the improved form of "What will you take for me?"

"Well," replies Venus, still blowing his tea, "I'm not prepared, at a moment's notice, to tell you, Mr. Wegg."

"Come! According to your own account I'm not worth much," Wegg reasons persuasively.

"Not for miscellaneous working in, I grant you, Mr. Wegg; but you might turn out valuable yet, as a" — here Mr. Venus takes a gulp of tea, so hot that it makes him choke, and sets his weak eyes watering, — "as a Monstrosity, if you'll excuse me."

Repressing an indignant look, indicative of anything but a disposition to excuse him, Silas pursues his point.

"I think you know me, Mr. Venus, and I think you know I never bargain."

Mr. Venus takes gulps of hot tea, shutting his eyes at every gulp, and opening them again in a spasmodic manner; but does not commit himself to assent.

"I have a prospect of getting on in life and elevating myself by my own independent exertions," says Wegg feelingly, "and I should n't like, — I tell you openly I should *not* like, — under such circumstances, to be what I may call dispersed, a part of me here, and a part of me there, but should wish to collect myself like a genteel person."

"It 's a prospect at present, is it, Mr. Wegg? Then you have n't got the money for a deal about you? Then I 'll tell you what I 'll do with you; I 'll hold you over. I am a man of my word, and you need n't be afraid of my disposing of you. I 'll hold you over. That 's a promise. Oh, dear me, dear me!"

Fain to accept his promise, and wishing to propitiate him, Mr. Wegg looks on as he sighs and pours himself out more tea, and then says, trying to get a sympathetic tone into his voice: —

"You seem very low, Mr. Venus. Is business bad?"

"Never was so good."

"Is your hand out at all?"

"Never was so well in. Mr. Wegg, I 'm not only first in the trade, but I 'm *the* trade. You may go and buy a skeleton at the West End if you like, and pay the West End price, but it 'll be my putting together. I 've as much to do as I can possibly do, with the assistance of my young man, and I take a pride and a pleasure in it."

Mr. Venus thus delivers himself, his right hand extended, his smoking saucer in his left hand, protesting as though he were going to burst into a flood of tears.

"That ain't a state of things to make you low, Mr. Venus."

"Mr. Wegg, I know it ain't. Mr. Wegg, not to name myself as a workman without an equal, I 've gone on improving myself in my knowledge of Anatomy, till both by sight and by name I 'm perfect. Mr. Wegg, if you was brought here loose in a bag to be articulated, I 'd name your smallest bones blindfold equally with your largest, as fast as I could pick 'em out, and I 'd sort 'em all, and sort your wertebræ, in a manner that would equally surprise and charm you."

"Well," remarks Silas (though not quite so readily as last time), "*that* ain't a state of things to be low about. — Not for *you* to be low about leastways."

"Mr. Wegg, I know it ain't; Mr. Wegg, I know it ain't.

But it 's the heart that lowers me, it is the heart! Be so good as take and read that card out loud."

Silas receives one from his hand, which Venus takes from a wonderful litter in a drawer, and putting on his spectacles, reads:

"'Mr. Venus,'"

"Yes. Go on."

"'Preserver of Animals and Birds,'"

"Yes. Go on."

"'Articulator of human bones.'"

"That 's it," with a groan. "That 's it! Mr. Wegg, I 'm thirty-two, and a bachelor. Mr. Wegg, I love her. Mr. Wegg, she is worthy of being loved by a Potentate!" Here Silas is rather alarmed by Mr. Venus's springing to his feet in the hurry of his spirits, and haggardly confronting him with his hand on his coat-collar; but Mr. Venus, begging pardon, sits down again, saying, with the calmness of despair: —

"She objects to the business."

"Does she know the profits of it?"

"She knows the profits of it, but she don't appreciate the art of it, and she objects to it. 'I do not wish,' she writes in her own handwriting, 'to regard myself, nor yet to be regarded, in that boney light.'"

Mr. Venus pours himself out more tea, with a look and in an attitude of the deepest desolation.

"And so a man climbs to the top of the tree, Mr. Wegg, only to see that there 's no look-out when he 's up there! I sit here of a night surrounded by the lovely trophies of my art, and what have they done for me? Ruined me. Brought me to the pass of being informed that 'she does not wish to regard herself, nor yet to be regarded, in that boney light!'" Having repeated the fatal expressions, Mr. Venus drinks more tea by gulps, and offers an explanation of his doing so.

"It lowers me. When I 'm equally lowered all over, lethargy sets in. By sticking to it till one or two in the morning, I get oblivion. Don't let me detain you, Mr. Wegg. I 'm not company for any one."

"It is not on that account," says Silas, rising, "but because I 've got an appointment. It 's time I was at Harmon's."

"Eh?" said Mr. Venus. "Harmon's, up Battle Bridge way?"

Mr. Wegg admits that he is bound for that port.

"You ought to be in a good thing, if you 've worked yourself in there. There 's lots of money going, there."

"To think," says Silas, "that you should catch it up so quick, and know about it. Wonderful!"

"Not at all, Mr. Wegg. The old gentleman wanted to know the nature and worth of everything that was found in the dust; and many 's the bone, and feather, and what not, that he 's brought to me."

"Really, now!"

"Yes. (Oh, dear me, dear me!) And he 's buried quite in this neighbourhood, you know. Over yonder."

Mr. Wegg does not know, but he makes as if he did, by responsively nodding his head. He also follows with his eyes, and the toss of Venus's head: as if to seek a direction to over yonder.

"I took an interest in that discovery in the river," says Venus. "(She had n't written her cutting refusal at that time.) I 've got up there — never mind, though."

He had raised the candle at arm's length towards one of the dark shelves, and Mr. Wegg had turned to look, when he broke off.

"The old gentleman was well known all round here. There used to be stories about his having hidden all kinds of property in those dust mounds. I suppose there was nothing in 'em. Probably you know, Mr. Wegg?"

"Nothing in 'em," says Wegg, who has never heard a word of this before.

"Don't let me detain you. Good night!"

The unfortunate Mr. Venus gives him a shake of the hand with a shake of his own head, and, drooping down in his chair, proceeds to pour himself out more tea. Mr. Wegg, looking back over his shoulder as he pulls the door open by the strap, notices that the movement so shakes the crazy shop, and so shakes a momentary flare out of the candle, as that the babies — Hindoo, African, and British — the "human warious," the French gentleman, the green glass-eyed cats, the dogs, the ducks, and all the rest of the collection, show for an instant as if paralytically animated; while even poor little Cock Robin at Mr. Venus's elbow turns over on his innocent side. Next moment, Mr. Wegg is stumping under the gaslights and through the mud.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. BOFFIN IN CONSULTATION

WHOSOEVER had gone out of Fleet Street into the Temple at the date of this history, and had wandered disconsolate about the Temple until he stumbled on a dismal churchyard, and had looked up at the dismal windows commanding that churchyard until at the most dismal window of them all he saw a dismal boy, would in him have beheld, at one grand comprehensive swoop of the eye, the managing clerk, junior clerk, common-law clerk, conveyancing clerk, chancery clerk, every refinement and department of clerk, of Mr. Mortimer Lightwood, erewhile called in the newspapers eminent solicitor.

Mr. Boffin having been several times in communication with this clerkly essence, both on its own ground and at the Bower, had no difficulty in identifying it when he saw it up in its dusty eyrie. To the second floor on which the window was situated, he ascended, much preoccupied in mind by the uncertainties besetting the Roman Empire, and much regretting the death of the amiable Pertinax: who only last night had left the Imperial affairs in a state of great confusion, by falling a victim to the fury of the prætorian guards.

"Morning, morning, morning!" said Mr. Boffin, with a wave of his hand, as the office door was opened by the dismal boy, whose appropriate name was Blight. "Governor in?"

"Mr. Lightwood gave you an appointment, sir, I think?"

"I don't want him to give it, you know," returned Mr. Boffin; "I'll pay my way, my boy."

"No doubt, sir. Would you walk in? Mr. Lightwood ain't in at the present moment, but I expect him back very shortly. Would you take a seat in Mr. Lightwood's room, sir, while I look over our Appointment Book?" Young Blight made a great show of fetching from his desk a long, thin manuscript volume with a brown paper cover, and running his finger down the day's appointments, murmuring, "Mr. Aggs, Mr.

Baggs, Mr. Caggs, Mr. Daggs, Mr. Faggs, Mr. Gaggs, Mr. Boffin. Yes, sir; quite right. You are a little before your time, sir. Mr. Lightwood will be in directly."

"I 'm not in a hurry," said Mr. Boffin.

"Thank you, sir. I'll take the opportunity, if you please, of entering your name in our Callers' Book for the day." Young Blight made another great show of changing the volume, taking up a pen, sucking it, dipping it, and running over previous entries before he wrote. As, "Mr. Alley, Mr. Balley, Mr. Calley, Mr. Dalley, Mr. Falley, Mr. Galley, Mr. Halley, Mr. Lalley, Mr. Malley. And Mr. Boffin."

"Strict system here; eh, my lad?" said Mr. Boffin, as he was booked.

"Yes, sir," returned the boy. "I could n't get on without it."

By which he probably meant that his mind would have been shattered to pieces without this fiction of an occupation. Wearing in his solitary confinement no fetters that he could polish, and being provided with no drinking-cup that he could carve, he had fallen on the device of ringing alphabetical changes into the two volumes in question, or of entering vast numbers of persons out of the Directory as transacting business with Mr. Lightwood. It was the more necessary for his spirits, because, being of a sensitive temperament, he was apt to consider it personally disgraceful to himself that his master had no clients.

"How long have you been in the law, now?" asked Mr. Boffin, with a pounce, in his usual inquisitive way.

"I 've been in the law, now, sir, about three years."

"Must have been as good as born in it!" said Mr. Boffin, with admiration. "Do you like it?"

"I don't mind it much," returned young Blight, heaving a sigh, as if its bitterness were past.

"What wages do you get?"

"Half what I could wish," replied young Blight.

"What 's the whole that you could wish?"

"Fifteen shillings a week," said the boy.

"About how long might it take you now, at an average rate of going, to be a Judge?" asked Mr. Boffin, after surveying his small stature in silence.

The boy answered that he had not yet quite worked out that little calculation.

"I suppose there's nothing to prevent your going in for it?" said Mr. Boffin.

The boy virtually replied that as he had the honour to be a Briton who never never never, there was nothing to prevent his going in for it. Yet he seemed inclined to suspect that there might be something to prevent his coming out with it.

"Would a couple of pound help you up at all?" asked Mr. Boffin.

On this head young Blight had no doubt whatever, so Mr. Boffin made him a present of that sum of money, and thanked him for his attention to his (Mr. Boffin's) affairs; which, he added, were now, he believed, as good as settled.

Then Mr. Boffin, with his stick at his ear, like a Familiar Spirit explaining the office to him, sat staring at a little bookcase of Law Practice and Law Reports, and at a window, and at an empty blue bag, and at a stick of sealing-wax, and a pen, and a box of wafers, and an apple, and a writing-pad — all very dusty — and at a number of inky smears and blots, and at an imperfectly disguised gun-case pretending to be something legal, and at an iron box labelled HARMON ESTATE, until Mr. Lightwood appeared.

Mr. Lightwood explained that he came from the proctor's, with whom he had been engaged in transacting Mr. Boffin's affair.

"And they seem to have taken a deal out of you!" said Mr. Boffin, with commiseration.

Mr. Lightwood, without explaining that his weariness was chronic, proceeded with his exposition that, all forms of law having been at length complied with, will of Harmon deceased having been proved, death of Harmon next inheriting having been proved, &c. and so forth, Court of Chancery having been moved, &c. and so forth, he, Mr. Lightwood, had now the great gratification, honour, and happiness, again, &c. and so forth, of congratulating Mr. Boffin on coming into possession, as residuary legatee, of upwards of one hundred thousand pounds, standing in the books of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England, again, &c. and so forth.

"And what is particularly eligible in the property, Mr. Boffin, is, that it involves no trouble. There are no estates to manage, no rents to return so much per cent. upon in bad times (which is an extremely dear way of getting your name into the newspapers), no voters to become parboiled in hot water with,

no agents to take the cream off the milk before it comes to table. You could put the whole in a cash-box to-morrow morning, and take it with you to — say, to the Rocky Mountains. Inasmuch as every man," concluded Mr. Lightwood, with an indolent smile, "appears to be under a fatal spell which obliges him, sooner or later, to mention the Rocky Mountains in a tone of extreme familiarity to some other man, I hope you 'll excuse my pressing you into the service of that gigantic range of geographical bores."

Without following this last remark very closely, Mr. Boffin cast his perplexed gaze first at the ceiling, and then at the carpet.

"Well," he remarked, "I don't know what to say about it, I am sure. I was a'most as well as I was. It 's a great lot to take care of."

"My dear Mr. Boffin, then *don't* take care of it!"

"Eh?" said that gentleman.

"Speaking now," returned Mortimer, "with the irresponsible imbecility of a private individual, and not with the profundity of a professional adviser, I should say that if the circumstance of its being too much weighs upon your mind, you have the haven of consolation open to you that you can easily make it less. And if you should be apprehensive of the trouble of doing so, there is the further haven of consolation that any number of people will take the trouble off your hands."

"Well! I don't quite see it," retorted Mr. Boffin, still perplexed. "That 's not satisfactory, you know, what you 're a saying."

"Is Anything satisfactory, Mr. Boffin?" asked Mortimer, raising his eyebrows.

"I used to find it so," answered Mr. Boffin, with a wistful look. "While I was foreman at the Bower — afore it *was* the Bower — I considered the business very satisfactory. The old man was a awful Tartar (saying it, I 'm sure, without disrespect to his memory), but the business was a pleasant one to look after, from before daylight to past dark. It 's a'most a pity," said Mr. Boffin, rubbing his ear, "that he ever went and made so much money. It would have been better for him if he had n't so given himself up to it. You may depend upon it," making the discovery all of a sudden, "that he found it a great lot to take care of!"

Mr. Lightwood coughed, not convinced.

"And speaking of satisfactory," pursued Mr. Boffin, "why, Lord save us! when we come to take it to pieces, bit by bit, where 's the satisfactoriness of the money as yet? When the old man does right the poor boy after all, the poor boy gets no good of it. He gets made away with, at the moment when he 's lifting (as one may say) the cup and sarser to his lips. Mr. Lightwood, I will now name to you, that on behalf of the poor dear boy, me and Mrs. Boffin have stood out against the old man times out of number, till he has called us every name he could lay his tongue to. I have seen him, after Mrs. Boffin has given him her mind respecting the claims of the nat'ral affections, catch off Mrs. Boffin's bonnet (she wore, in general, a black straw, perched as a matter of convenience on the top of her head), and send it spinning across the yard. I have indeed. And once, when he did this in a manner that amounted to personal, I should have given him a rattler for himself, if Mrs. Boffin had n't thrown herself betwixt us, and received flush on the temple. Which dropped her, Mr. Lightwood. Dropped her."

Mr. Lightwood murmured, "Equal honour — Mrs. Boffin's head and heart."

"You understand; I name this," pursued Mr. Boffin, "to show you, now the affairs are wound up, that me and Mrs. Boffin have ever stood, as we were in Christian honour bound, the children's friend. Me and Mrs. Boffin stood the poor girl's friend; me and Mrs. Boffin stood the poor boy's friend; me and Mrs. Boffin up and faced the old man when we momently expected to be turned out for our pains. As to Mrs. Boffin," said Mr. Boffin, lowering his voice, "she might n't wish it mentioned now she 's Fashionable, but she went so far as to tell him, in my presence, he was a flinty-hearted rascal."

Mr. Lightwood murmured, "Vigorous Saxon spirit — Mrs. Boffin's ancestors — bowmen — Agincourt and Cressy."

"The last time me and Mrs. Boffin saw the poor boy," said Mr. Boffin, warming (as fat usually does) with a tendency to melt, "he was a child of seven year old. For when he come back to make intercession for his sister, me and Mrs. Boffin were away overlooking a country contract which was to be sifted before carted, and he was come and gone in a single hour. I say he was a child of seven year old. He was going

away, all alone and forlorn, to that foreign school, and he come into our place, situate up the yard of the present Bower, to have a warm at our fire. There was his little scanty travelling clothes upon him. There was his little scanty box outside in the shivering wind, which I was going to carry for him down to the steamboat, as the old man would n't hear of allowing a sixpence coach-money. Mrs. Boffin, then quite a young woman and a pictur of a full-blown rose, stands him by her, kneels down at the fire, warms her two open hands, and falls to rubbing his cheeks; but seeing the tears come into the child's eyes, the tears come fast into her own, and she holds him round the neck, like as if she was protecting him, and cries to me, 'I 'd give the wide wide world, I would, to run away with him!' I don't say but what it cut me, and but what it at the same time heightened my feelings of admiration for Mrs. Boffin. The poor child clings to her for a while, as she clings to him, and then, when the old man calls, he says, 'I must go! God bless you!' and for a moment rests his heart against her bosom, and looks up at both of us, as if it was in pain — in agony. Such a look! I went aboard with him (I gave him first what little treat I thought he 'd like), and I left him when he had fallen asleep in his berth, and I came back to Mrs. Boffin. But tell her what I would of how I had left him, it all went for nothing, for, according to her thoughts, he never changed that look that he had looked up at us two. But it did one piece of good. Mrs. Boffin and me had no child of our own, and had sometimes wished that how we had one. But not now. 'We might both of us die,' says Mrs. Boffin, 'and other eyes might see that lonely look in our child.' So of a night, when it was very cold, or when the wind roared, or the rain dripped heavy, she would wake sobbing, and call out in a fluster, 'Don't you see the poor child's face! Oh, shelter the poor child!' — till in course of years it gently wore out, as many things do."

"My dear Mr. Boffin, everything wears to rags," said Mortimer, with a light laugh.

"I won't go so far as to say everything," returned Mr. Boffin, on whom his manner seemed to grate, "because there 's some things that I never found among the dust. Well, sir. So Mrs. Boffin and me grow older and older in the old man's service, living and working pretty hard in it, till the old man is discovered dead in his bed. Then Mrs. Boffin and me seal up his

box, always standing on the table at the side of his bed, and having frequently heard tell of the Temple as a spot where lawyers' dust is contracted for, I come down here in search of a lawyer to advise, and I see your young man up at this present elevation chopping at the flies on the window-sill with his penknife, and I give him a Hoy! not then having the pleasure of your acquaintance, and by that means come to gain the honour. Then you, and the gentleman in the uncomfortable neck-cloth under the little archway in St. Paul's Churchyard — "

"Doctors' Commons," observed Lightwood.

"I understood it was another name," said Mr. Boffin, pausing, "but you know best. Then you and Doctor Scommons, you go to work, and you do the thing that's proper, and you and Doctor S. take steps for finding out the poor boy, and at last you do find out the poor boy, and me and Mrs. Boffin often exchange the observation, 'We shall see him again, under happy circumstances.' But it was never to be; and the want of satisfactoriness is, that after all the money never gets to him."

"But it gets," remarked Lightwood, with a languid inclination of the head, "into excellent hands."

"It gets into the hands of me and Mrs. Boffin only this very day and hour, and that's what I'm working round to, having waited for this day and hour a' purpose. Mr. Lightwood, here has been a wicked, cruel murder. By that murder me and Mrs. Boffin mysteriously profit. For the apprehension and conviction of the murderer, we offer a reward of one tithe of the property — a reward of Ten Thousand Pound."

"Mr. Boffin, it's too much."

"Mr. Lightwood, me and Mrs. Boffin have fixed the sum together, and we stand to it."

"But let me represent to you," returned Lightwood, "speaking now with professional profundity, and not with individual imbecility, that the offer of such an immense reward is a temptation to forced suspicion, forced construction of circumstances, strained accusation, a whole tool-box of edged tools."

"Well," said Mr. Boffin, a little staggered, "that's the sum we put o' one side for the purpose. Whether it shall be openly declared in the new notices that must now be put about in our names — "

"In your name, Mr. Boffin; in your name."

"Very well; in my name, which is the same as Mrs. Boffin's,

and means both of us, is to be considered in drawing 'em up. But this is the first instruction that I, as the owner of the property, give to my lawyer on coming into it."

"Your lawyer, Mr. Boffin," returned Lightwood, making a very short note of it with a very rusty pen, "has the gratification of taking the instruction. There is another?"

"There is just one other, and no more. Make me as compact a little will as can be reconciled with tightness, leaving the whole of the property to 'my beloved wife, Henerietty Boffin, sole executrix.' Make it as short as you can, using those words; but make it tight."

At some loss to fathom Mr. Boffin's notions of a tight will, Lightwood felt his way.

"I beg your pardon, but professional profundity must be exact. When you say tight —"

"I mean tight," Mr. Boffin explained.

"Exactly so. And nothing can be more laudable. But is the tightness to bind Mrs. Boffin to any and what conditions?"

"Bind Mrs. Boffin?" interposed her husband. "No! What are you thinking of! What I want is, to make it all hers so tight as that her hold of it can't be loosed."

"Hers freely, to do what she likes with? Hers absolutely?"

"Absolutely?" repeated Mr. Boffin, with a short, sturdy laugh. "Hah! I should think so! It would be handsome in me to begin to bind Mrs. Boffin at this time of day!"

So that instruction, too, was taken by Mr. Lightwood; and Mr. Lightwood, having taken it, was in the act of showing Mr. Boffin out, when Mr. Eugene Wrayburn almost jostled him in the doorway. Consequently Mr. Lightwood said, in his cool manner, "Let me make you two known to one another," and further signified that Mr. Wrayburn was counsel learned in the law, and that, partly in the way of business and partly in the way of pleasure, he had imparted to Mr. Wrayburn some of the interesting facts of Mr. Boffin's biography.

"Delighted," said Eugene — though he did n't look so — "to know Mr. Boffin."

"Thankee, sir, thankee," returned that gentleman. "And how do *you* like the law?"

"A — not particularly," returned Eugene.

"Too dry for you, eh? Well, I suppose it wants some years

of sticking to, before you master it. But there 's nothing like work. Look at the bees."

"I beg your pardon," returned Eugene, with a reluctant smile, "but you will excuse my mentioning that I always protest against being referred to the bees?"

"Do you!" said Boffin.

"I object on principle," said Eugene, "as a biped —"

"As a what?" asked Mr. Boffin.

"As a two-footed creature; — I object on principle, as a two-footed creature, to being constantly referred to insects and four-footed creatures. I object to being required to model my proceedings according to the proceedings of the bee, or the dog, or the spider, or the camel. I fully admit that the camel, for instance, is an excessively temperate person; but he has several stomachs to entertain himself with, and I have only one. Besides, I am not fitted up with a convenient cool cellar to keep my drink in."

"But I said, you know," urged Boffin, rather at a loss for an answer, "the bee."

"Exactly. And may I represent to you that it 's injudicious to say the bee? for the whole case is assumed. Conceding for a moment that there is any analogy between a bee, and a man in a shirt and pantaloons (which I deny), and that it is settled that the man is to learn from the bee (which I also deny), the question still remains, what is he to learn? To imitate? Or to avoid? When your friends the bees worry themselves to that highly fluttered extent about their sovereign, and become perfectly distracted touching the slightest monarchical movement, are we men to learn the greatness of Tuft-hunting, or the littleness of the Court Circular? I am not clear, Mr. Boffin, but that the hive may be satirical."

"At all events they work," said Mr. Boffin.

"Ye-es," returned Eugene, disparagingly, "they work; but don't you think they overdo it? They work so much more than they need — they make so much more than they can eat — they are so incessantly boring and buzzing at their one idea till Death comes upon them — that don't you think they overdo it? And are human labourers to have no holidays, because of the bees? And am I never to have change of air, because the bees don't? Mr. Boffin, I think honey excellent at breakfast; but regarded in the light of my conventional schoolmaster and mor-

alist, I protest against the tyrannical humbug of your friend the bee. With the highest respect for you."

"Thankee," said Mr. Boffin. "Morning, morning!"

But the worthy Mr. Boffin jogged away with a comfortless impression he could have dispensed with, that there was a deal of unsatisfactoriness in the world, besides what he had recalled as appertaining to the Harmon property. And he was still jogging along Fleet Street in this condition of mind, when he became aware that he was closely tracked and observed by a man of genteel appearance.

"Now then?" said Mr. Boffin, stopping short, with his meditations brought to an abrupt check, "what's the next article?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Boffin."

"My name too, eh? How did you come by it? I don't know you."

"No, sir, you don't know me."

Mr. Boffin looked full at the man, and the man looked full at him. "No," said Mr. Boffin, after a glance at the pavement, as if it were made of faces and he were trying to match the man's, "I *don't* know you."

"I am nobody," said the stranger, "and not like to be known; but Mr. Boffin's wealth —"

"Oh! that's got about already, has it?" muttered Mr. Boffin.

"— And his romantic manner of acquiring it, make him conspicuous. You were pointed out to me the other day."

"Well," said Mr. Boffin, "I should say I was a disappintment to you when I *was* pinted out, if your politeness would allow you to confess it, for I am well aware I am not much to look at. What might you want with me? Not in the law, are you?"

"No, sir."

"No information to give, for a reward?"

"No, sir."

There may have been a momentary mantling in the face of the man as he made the last answer, but it passed directly.

"If I don't mistake, you have followed me from my lawyer's and tried to fix my attention. Say out! Have you? Or have n't you?" demanded Mr. Boffin, rather angry.

"Yes."

"Why have you?"

"If you will allow me to walk beside you, Mr. Boffin, I will tell you. Would you object to turn aside into this place — I think it is called Clifford's Inn — where we can hear one another better than in the roaring street?"

("Now," thought Mr. Boffin, "if he proposes a game at skittles, or meets a country gentleman just come into property, or produces any article of jewellery he has found, I 'll knock him down!" With this discreet reflection, and carrying his stick in his arm as Punch carries his, Mr. Boffin turned into Clifford's Inn aforesaid.)

"Mr. Boffin, I happened to be in Chancery Lane this morning when I saw you going along before me. I took the liberty of following you, trying to make up my mind to speak to you, till you went into your lawyer's. Then I waited outside till you came out."

("Don't quite sound like skittles, nor yet country gentleman, nor yet jewellery," thought Mr. Boffin, "but there 's no knowing.")

"I am afraid my object is a bold one, I am afraid it has little of the usual practical world about it, but I venture it. If you ask me, or if you ask yourself — which is more likely — what emboldens me, I answer, I have been strongly assured that you are a man of rectitude and plain dealing, with the soundest of sound hearts, and that you are blessed in a wife distinguished by the same qualities."

"Your information is true of Mrs. Boffin, anyhow," was Mr. Boffin's answer, as he surveyed his new friend again. There was something repressed in the strange man's manner, and he walked with his eyes on the ground — though conscious, for all that, of Mr. Boffin's observation — and he spoke in a subdued voice. But his words came easily, and his voice was agreeable in tone, albeit constrained.

"When I add, I can discern for myself what the general tongue says of you — that you are quite unspoiled by Fortune, and not uplifted — I trust you will not, as a man of an open nature, suspect that I mean to flatter you, but will believe that all I mean is to excuse myself, these being my only excuses for my present intrusion."

("How much?" thought Mr. Boffin. "It must be coming to money. How much?")

"You will probably change your manner of living, Mr. Boffin, in your changed circumstances. You will probably keep a larger house, have many matters to arrange, and be beset by numbers of correspondents. If you would try me as your Secretary —"

"As *what?*" cried Mr. Boffin, with his eyes wide open.

"Your Secretary."

"Well," said Mr. Boffin, under his breath, "that's a queer thing!"

"Or," pursued the stranger, wondering at Mr. Boffin's wonder, "if you would try me as your man of business under any name, I know you would find me faithful and grateful, and I hope you would find me useful. You may naturally think that my immediate object is money. Not so, for I would willingly serve you a year — two years — any term you might appoint — before that should begin to be a consideration between us."

"Where do you come from?" asked Mr. Boffin.

"I come," returned the other, meeting his eye, "from many countries."

Mr. Boffin's acquaintance with the names and situations of foreign lands being limited in extent and somewhat confused in quality, he shaped his next question on an elastic model.

"From — any particular place?"

"I have been in many places."

"What have you been?" asked Mr. Boffin.

Here again he made no great advance, for the reply was, "I have been a student and a traveller."

"But if it ain't a liberty to plump it out," said Mr. Boffin, "what do you do for your living?"

"I have mentioned," returned the other, with another look at him, and a smile, "what I aspire to do. I have been superseded as to some slight intentions I had, and I may say that I have now to begin life."

Not very well knowing how to get rid of this applicant, and feeling the more embarrassed because his manner and appearance claimed a delicacy in which the worthy Mr. Boffin feared he himself might be deficient, that gentleman glanced into the mouldy little plantation or cat-preserve, of Clifford's Inn, as it was that day, in search of a suggestion. Sparrows were there, cats were there, dry-rot and wet-rot were there, but it was not otherwise a suggestive spot.

"All this time," said the stranger, producing a little pocket-book and taking out a card, "I have not mentioned my name. My name is Rokesmith. I lodge at one Mr. Wilfer's, at Holloway."

Mr. Boffin stared again.

"Father of Miss Bella Wilfer?" said he.

"My landlord has a daughter named Bella. Yes; no doubt."

Now, this name had been more or less in Mr. Boffin's thoughts all the morning, and for days before; therefore he said: —

"That 's singular, too!" unconsciously staring again, past all bounds of good manners, with the card in his hand. "Though, by the bye, I suppose it was one of that family that pinted me out?"

"No. I have never been in the streets with one of them."

"Heard me talked of among 'em, though?"

"No. I occupy my own rooms, and have held scarcely any communication with them."

"Odder and odder!" said Mr. Boffin. "Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I don't know what to say to you."

"Say nothing," returned Mr. Rokesmith: "allow me to call on you in a few days. I am not so unconscionable as to think it likely that you would accept me on trust at first sight, and take me out of the very street. Let me come to you for your further opinion, at your leisure."

"That 's fair, and I don't object," said Mr. Boffin; "but it must be on condition that it 's fully understood that I no more know that I shall ever be in want of any gentleman as Secretary — it *was* Secretary you said; was n't it?"

"Yes."

Again Mr. Boffin's eyes opened wide, and he stared at the applicant from head to foot, repeating, "Queer! — You 're sure it was Secretary? Are you?"

"I am sure I said so."

— "As Secretary," repeated Mr. Boffin, meditating upon the word; "I no more know that I may ever want a Secretary, or what-not, than I do that I shall ever be in want of the man in the moon. Me and Mrs. Boffin have not even settled that we shall make any change in our way of life. Mrs. Boffin's inclinations certainly do tend towards Fashion; but being

already set up in a fashionable way at the Bower, she may not make further alterations. However, sir, as you don't press yourself, I wish to meet you so far as saying, by all means call at the Bower if you like. Call in the course of a week or two. At the same time, I consider that I ought to name, in addition to what I have already named, that I have in my employment a literary man — *with* a wooden leg — as I have no thoughts of parting from."

"I regret to hear I am in some sort anticipated," Mr. Rokesmith answered, evidently having heard it with surprise; "but perhaps other duties might arise?"

"You see," returned Mr. Boffin, with a confidential sense of dignity, "as to my literary man's duties, they 're clear. Professionally he declines and he falls, and as a friend he drops into poetry."

Without observing that these duties seemed by no means clear to Mr. Rokesmith's astonished comprehension, Mr. Boffin went on: —

"And now, sir, I 'll wish you good day. You can call at the Bower any time in a week or two. It 's not above a mile or so from you, and your landlord can direct you to it. But as he may not know it by its new name of Boffin's Bower, say, when you inquire of him, it 's Harmon's, will you?"

"Harmoon's," repeated Mr. Rokesmith, seeming to have caught the sound imperfectly, "Harmarn's. How do you spell it?"

"Why, as to the spelling of it," returned Mr. Boffin, with great presence of mind, "that 's *your* lookout. Harmon's is all you 've got to say to *him*. Morning, morning, morning!" And so departed, without looking back.

CHAPTER IX

MR. AND MRS. BOFFIN IN CONSULTATION

BETAKING himself straight homeward, Mr. Boffin, without further let or hindrance, arrived at the Bower, and gave Mrs. Boffin (in a walking-dress of black velvet and feathers, like a mourning coach-horse) an account of all he had said and done since breakfast.

"This brings us round, my dear," he then pursued, "to the question we left unfinished: namely, whether there's to be any new go-in for Fashion."

"Now I'll tell you what I want, Noddy," said Mrs. Boffin, smoothing her dress with an air of immense enjoyment, "I want Society."

"Fashionable Society, my dear?"

"Yes!" cried Mrs. Boffin, laughing with the glee of a child. "Yes! It's no good my being kept here like Wax-Work; is it now?"

"People have to pay to see Wax-Work, my dear," returned her husband, "whereas (though you'd be cheap at the same money) the neighbours is welcome to see *you* for nothing."

"But it don't answer," said the cheerful Mrs. Boffin. "When we worked like the neighbours, we suited one another. Now we have left work off, we have left off suiting one another."

"What, do you think of beginning work again?" Mr. Boffin hinted.

"Out of the question! We have come into a great fortune, and we must do what's right by our fortune; we must act up to it."

Mr. Boffin, who had a deep respect for his wife's intuitive wisdom, replied, though rather pensively: "I suppose we must."

"It's never been acted up to yet, and, consequently, no good has come of it," said Mrs. Boffin.

"True, to the present time," Mr. Boffin assented, with his

former pensiveness, as he took his seat upon his settle. "I hope good may be coming of it in the future time. Towards which, what's your views, old lady?"

Mrs. Boffin, a smiling creature, broad of figure and simple of nature, with her hands folded in her lap, and with buxom creases in her throat, proceeded to expound her views.

"*I* say, a good house in a good neighbourhood, good things about us, good living, and good society. *I* say, live like our means, without extravagance, and be happy."

"Yes, *I* say be happy, too," assented the still pensive Mr. Boffin.

"Lor-a-mussy!" exclaimed Mrs. Boffin, laughing and clapping her hands, and gaily rocking herself to and fro, "when I think of me in a light yellow chariot and pair, with silver boxes to the wheels —"

"Oh! you was thinking of that, was you, my dear?"

"Yes!" cried the delighted creature. "And with a footman up behind, with a bar across, to keep his legs from being poled! And with a coachman up in front, sinking down into a seat big enough for three of him, all covered with upholstery in green and white! And with two bay horses tossing their head and stepping higher than they trot long-ways! And with you and me leaning back inside, as grand as ninepence! Oh-h-h-h My! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Mrs. Boffin clapped her hands again, rocked herself again, beat her feet upon the floor, and wiped the tears of laughter from her eyes.

"And what, my old lady," inquired Mr. Boffin, when he also had sympathetically laughed: "What's your views on the subject of the Bower!"

"Shut it up. Don't part with it, but put somebody in it, to keep it."

"Any other views?"

"Noddy," said Mrs. Boffin, coming from her fashionable sofa to his side on the plain settle, and hooking her comfortable arm through his. "Next I think — and I really have been thinking early and late — of the disappointed girl; her that was so cruelly disappointed, you know, both of her husband and his riches. Don't you think we might do something for her? Have her to live with us? Or something of that sort?"

"Ne-ver once thought of the way of doing it!" cried Mr.

Boffin, smiting the table in his admiration. "What a thinking steam-ingein this old lady is. And she don't know how she does it. Neither does the ingein!"

Mrs. Boffin pulled his nearest ear, in acknowledgment of this piece of philosophy, and then said, gradually toning down to a motherly strain: "Last, and not least, I have taken a fancy. You remember dear little John Harmon, before he went to school? Over yonder across the yard, at our fire? Now that he is past all benefit of the money, and it 's come to us, I should like to find some orphan child, and take the boy and adopt him and give him John's name, and provide for him. Somehow it would make me easier, I fancy. Say it 's only a whim —"

"But I don't say so," interposed her husband.

"No, but, deary, if you did —"

"I should be a Beast if I did," her husband interposed again.

"That 's as much as to say you agree? Good and kind of you, and like you, deary! And don't you begin to find it pleasant now," said Mrs. Boffin, once more radiant in her comely way from head to foot, and once more smoothing her dress with immense enjoyment, "don't you begin to find it pleasant already, to think that a child will be made brighter, and better, and happier, because of that poor sad child that day? And is n't it pleasant to know that the good will be done with the poor sad child's own money?"

"Yes; and it 's pleasant to know that you are Mrs. Boffin," said her husband, "and it 's been a pleasant thing to know this many and many a year!" It was ruin to Mrs. Boffin's aspirations, but, having so spoken, they sat side by side, a hopelessly Unfashionable pair.

These two ignorant and unpolished people had guided themselves so far on in their journey of life, by a religious sense of duty and desire to do right. Ten thousand weaknesses and absurdities might have been detected in the breasts of both; ten thousand vanities additional, possibly, in the breast of the woman. But the hard, wrathful, and sordid nature that had wrung as much work out of them as could be got in their best days, for as little money as could be paid to hurry on their worst, had never been so warped but that it knew their moral straightness and respected it. In its own despite, in a constant

conflict with itself and them, it had done so. And this is the eternal law. For Evil often stops short at itself and dies with the doer of it; but Good, never.

Through his most inveterate purposes, the dead Jailer of Harmony Jail had known these two faithful servants to be honest and true. While he raged at them and reviled them for opposing him with the speech of the honest and true, it had scratched his stony heart, and he had perceived the powerlessness of all his wealth to buy them if he had addressed himself to the attempt. So, even while he was their griping taskmaster and never gave them a good word, he had written their names down in his will. So, even while it was his daily declaration that he mistrusted all mankind, — and sorely indeed he did mistrust all who bore any resemblance to himself, — he was as certain that these two people, surviving him, would be trustworthy in all things from the greatest to the least, as he was that he must surely die.

Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, sitting side by side, with Fashion withdrawn to an immeasurable distance, fell to discussing how they could best find their orphan. Mrs. Boffin suggested advertisement in the newspapers, requesting orphans answering annexed description to apply at the Bower on a certain day; but Mr. Boffin wisely apprehending obstruction of the neighbouring thoroughfares by orphan swarms, this course was negatived. Mrs. Boffin next suggested application to their clergyman for a likely orphan. Mr. Boffin thinking better of this scheme, they resolved to call upon the reverend gentleman at once, and to take the same opportunity of making acquaintance with Miss Bella Wilfer. In order that these visits might be visits of state, Mrs. Boffin's equipage was ordered out.

This consisted of a long hammer-headed old horse, formerly used in the business, attached to a four-wheeled chaise of the same period, which had long been exclusively used by the Harmony Jail poultry as the favourite laying-place of several discreet hens. An unwonted application of corn to the horse, and of paint and varnish to the carriage, when both fell in as a part of the Boffin legacy, had made what Mr. Boffin considered a neat turn-out of the whole; and a driver being added, in the person of a long hammer-headed young man, who was a very good match for the horse, left nothing to be desired. He, too, had been formerly used in the business, but was now entombed

by an honest jobbing tailor of the district in a perfect Sepulchre of coat and gaiters, sealed with ponderous buttons.

Behind this domestic Mr. and Mrs. Boffin took their seats in the back compartment of the vehicle, which was sufficiently commodious, but had an undignified and alarming tendency, in getting over a rough crossing, to hiccup itself away from the front compartment. On their being descried emerging from the gates of the Bower, the neighbourhood turned out at door and window to salute the Boffins. Among those who were ever and again left behind, staring after the equipage, were many youthful spirits, who hailed it in stentorian tones with such congratulations as "Nod-dy Boffin!" "Bof-fin's mo-ney!" "Down with the dust, Bof-fin!" and other similar compliments. These the hammer-headed young man took in such ill part that he often impaired the majesty of the progress by pulling up short, and making as though he would alight to exterminate the offenders; a purpose from which he only allowed himself to be dissuaded after long and lively arguments with his employers.

At length the Bower district was left behind, and the peaceful dwelling of the Reverend Frank Milvey was gained. The Reverend Frank Milvey's abode was a very modest abode, because his income was a very modest income. He was officially accessible to every blundering old woman who had incoherence to bestow upon him, and readily received the Boffins. He was quite a young man, expensively educated and wretchedly paid, with quite a young wife and half a dozen quite young children. He was under the necessity of teaching and translating from the classics, to eke out his scanty means, yet was generally expected to have more time to spare than the idlest person in the parish, and more money than the richest. He accepted the needless inequalities and inconsistencies of his life with a kind of conventional submission that was almost slavish; and any daring layman who would have adjusted such burdens as his more decently and graciously would have had small help from him.

With a ready patient face and manner, and yet with a latent smile that showed a quick enough observation of Mrs. Boffin's dress, Mr. Milvey, in his little book-room — charged with sounds and cries as though the six children above were coming down through the ceiling, and the roasting leg of mutton below

were coming up through the floor — listened to Mrs. Boffin's statement of her want of an orphan.

"I think," said Mr. Milvey, "that you have never had a child of your own, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin?"

"Never."

"But, like the kings and queens in the fairy tales, I suppose you have wished for one?"

"In a general way, yes."

Mr. Milvey smiled again, as he remarked to himself, "Those kings and queens were always wishing for children." It occurring to him, perhaps, that if they had been curates, their wishes might have tended in the opposite direction.

"I think," he pursued, "we had better take Mrs. Milvey into our Council. She is indispensable to me. If you please, I'll call her."

So Mr. Milvey called, "Margaretta, my dear!" and Mrs. Milvey came down. A pretty, bright little woman, something worn by anxiety, who had repressed many pretty tastes and bright fancies, and substituted in their stead, schools, soup, flannel, coals, and all the week-day cares and Sunday coughs of a large population, young and old. As gallantly had Mr. Milvey repressed much in himself that naturally belonged to his old studies and old fellow-students, and taken up among the poor and their children with the hard crumbs of life.

"Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, my dear, whose good fortune you have heard of."

Mrs. Milvey, with the most unaffected grace in the world, congratulated them, and was glad to see them. Yet her engaging face, being an open as well as a perceptive one, was not without her husband's latent smile.

"Mrs. Boffin wishes to adopt a little boy, my dear."

Mrs. Milvey looking rather alarmed, her husband added: —

"An orphan, my dear."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Milvey, reassured for her own little boys.

"And I was thinking, Margaretta, that perhaps old Mrs. Goody's grandchild might answer the purpose."

"Oh, my *dear* Frank! I *don't* think that would do."

"No?"

"Oh, *no!*"

The smiling Mrs. Boffin, feeling it incumbent on her to take part in the conversation, and being charmed with the emphatic

little wife and her ready interest, here offered her acknowledgments and inquired what there was against him?

"I *don't* think," said Mrs. Milvey, glancing at the Reverend Frank, — "and I believe my husband will agree with me when he considers it again, — that you could possibly keep that orphan clean from snuff. Because his grandmother takes so *many* ounces, and drops it over him."

"But he would not be living with his grandmother then, Margaretta," said Mr. Milvey.

"No, Frank, but it would be impossible to keep her from Mrs. Boffin's house; and the *more* there was to eat and drink there, the oftener she would go. And she *is* an inconvenient woman. I *hope* it 's not uncharitable to remember that last Christmas Eve she drank eleven cups of tea, and grumbled all the time. And she is *not* a grateful woman, Frank. You recollect her addressing a crowd outside this house, about her wrongs, when, one night after we had gone to bed, she brought back the petticoat of new flannel that had been given her, because it was too short."

"That 's true," said Mr. Milvey. "I don't think that would do. Would little Harrison — "

"Oh, *Frank!*" remonstrated his emphatic wife.

"He has no grandmother, my dear."

"No, but I *don't* think Mrs. Boffin would like an orphan who squints so *much*."

"That 's true again," said Mr. Milvey, becoming haggard with perplexity. "If a little girl would do — "

"But, my *dear* Frank, Mrs. Boffin wants a boy."

"That 's true again," said Mr. Milvey. "Tom Bocker is a nice boy" (thoughtfully).

"But I *doubt*, Frank," Mrs. Milvey hinted, after a little hesitation, "if Mrs. Boffin wants an orphan *quite* nineteen, who drives a cart and waters the roads."

Mr. Milvey referred the point to Mrs. Boffin in a look; on that smiling lady's shaking her black velvet bonnet and bows, he remarked, in lower spirits, "that 's true again."

"I am sure," said Mrs. Boffin, concerned at giving so much trouble, "that if I had known you would have taken so much pains, sir, — and you too, ma'am, — I don't think I would have come."

"*Pray* don't say that!" urged Mrs. Milvey.

"No, don't say that," assented Mr. Milvey, "because we are so much obliged to you for giving us the preference." Which Mrs. Milvey confirmed; and really the kind, conscientious couple spoke as if they kept some profitable orphan warehouse and were personally patronised. "But it is a responsible trust," added Mr. Milvey, and "difficult to discharge. At the same time, we are naturally very unwilling to lose the chance you so kindly give us, and if you could afford us a day or two to look about us, — you know, Margaretta, we might carefully examine the workhouse, and the Infant School, and your District."

"To be *sure!*" said the emphatic little wife.

"We have orphans, I know," pursued Mr. Milvey, quite with the air as if he might have added "in stock," and quite as anxiously as if there were great competition in the business and he were afraid of losing an order, "over at the clay-pits; but they are employed by relations or friends, and I am afraid it would come at last to a transaction in the way of barter. And even if you exchanged blankets for the child, — or books and firing, — it would be impossible to prevent their being turned into liquor."

Accordingly, it was resolved that Mr. and Mrs. Milvey should search for an orphan likely to suit, and as free as possible from the foregoing objections, and should communicate again with Mrs. Boffin. Then, Mr. Boffin took the liberty of mentioning to Mr. Milvey that if Mr. Milvey would do him the kindness to be perpetually his banker to the extent of "a twenty-pound note or so," to be expended without any reference to him, he would be heartily obliged. At this, both Mr. Milvey and Mrs. Milvey were quite as much pleased as if they had no wants of their own, but only knew what poverty was in the persons of other people; and so the interview terminated with satisfaction and good opinion on all sides.

"Now, old lady," said Mr. Boffin, as they resumed their seats behind the hammer-headed horse and man, "having made a very agreeable visit there, we 'll try Wilfer's."

It appeared, on their drawing up at the family gate, that to try Wilfer's was a thing more easily projected than done, on account of the extreme difficulty of getting into that establishment; three pulls at the bell producing no external result, though each was attended by audible sounds of scampering and rushing within. At the fourth tug — vindictively administered

by the hammer-headed young man — Miss Lavinia appeared, emerging from the house in an accidental manner, with a bonnet and parasol, as designing to take a contemplative walk. The young lady was astonished to find visitors at the gate, and expressed her feelings in appropriate action.

"Here 's Mr. and Mrs. Boffin!" growled the hammer-headed young man through the bars of the gate, and at the same time shaking it, as if he were on view in a menagerie; "they 've been here half an hour."

"Who did you say?" asked Miss Lavinia.

"Mr. and Mrs. BOFFIN!" returned the young man, rising into a roar.

Miss Lavinia tripped up the steps to the house-door, tripped down the steps with the key, tripped across the little garden, and opened the gate. "Please to walk in," said Miss Lavinia haughtily. "Our servant is out."

Mr. and Mrs. Boffin complying, and pausing in the little hall until Miss Lavinia came up to show them where to go next, perceived three pairs of listening legs upon the stairs above. Mrs. Wilfer's legs, Miss Bella's legs, and Mr. George Sampson's legs.

"Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, I think?" said Lavinia, in a warning voice.

Strained attention on the part of Mrs. Wilfer's legs, of Miss Bella's legs, of Mr. George Sampson's legs.

"Yes, miss."

"If you 'll step this way — down these stairs — I 'll let ma know."

Excited flight of Mrs. Wilfer's legs, of Miss Bella's legs, of Mr. George Sampson's legs.

After waiting some quarter of an hour alone in the family sitting-room, which presented traces of having been so hastily arranged after a meal, that one might have doubted whether it was made tidy for visitors, or cleared for blindman's buff, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin became aware of the entrance of Mrs. Wilfer, majestically faint, and with a condescending stitch in her side, which was her company manner.

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Wilfer, after the first salutations, and as soon as she had adjusted the handkerchief under her chin, and waved her gloved hands, "to what am I indebted for this honour?"

"To make short of it, ma'am," returned Mr. Boffin, "perhaps you may be acquainted with the names of me and Mrs. Boffin, as having come into a certain property."

"I have heard, sir," returned Mrs. Wilfer, with a dignified bend of her head, "of such being the case."

"And I dare say, ma'am," pursued Mr. Boffin, while Mrs. Boffin added confirmatory nods and smiles, "you are not very much inclined to take kindly to us?"

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Wilfer. "'T were unjust to visit upon Mr. and Mrs. Boffin a calamity which was doubtless a dispensation." These words were rendered the more effective by a serenely heroic expression of suffering.

"That 's fairly meant, I am sure," remarked the honest Mr. Boffin; "Mrs. Boffin and me are plain people, and we don't want to pretend to anything, nor yet to go round and round at anything; because there 's always a straight way to everything. Consequently, we make this call to say that we shall be glad to have the honour and pleasure of your daughter's acquaintance, and that we shall be rejiced if your daughter will come to consider our house in the light of her home equally with this. In short, we want to cheer your daughter, and to give her the opportunity of sharing such pleasures as we are a going to take ourselves. We want to brisk her up, and brisk her about, and give her a change."

"That 's it!" said the open-hearted Mrs. Boffin. "Lor! Let 's be comfortable."

Mrs. Wilfer bent her head in a distant manner to her lady visitor, and with majestic monotony replied to the gentleman:

"Pardon me. I have several daughters. Which of my daughters am I to understand is thus favoured by the kind intentions of Mr. Boffin and his lady?"

"Don't you see?" the ever-smiling Mrs. Boffin put in. "Naturally, Miss Bella, you know."

"Oh-h!" said Mrs. Wilfer, with a severely unconvinced look. "My daughter Bella is accessible and shall speak for herself." Then opening the door a little way, simultaneously with a sound of scuttling outside it, the good lady made the proclamation, "Send Miss Bella to me!" Which proclamation, though grandly formal, and one might almost say heraldic, to hear, was in fact enunciated with her maternal eyes reproachfully glaring on that young lady in the flesh — and in so much of it that she

was retiring with difficulty into the small closet under the stairs, apprehensive of the emergence of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin.

"The avocations of R. W., my husband," Mrs. Wilfer explained, on resuming her seat, "keep him fully engaged in the City at this time of the day, or he would have had the honour of participating in your reception beneath our humble roof."

"Very pleasant premises!" said Mr. Boffin cheerfully.

"Pardon me, sir," returned Mrs. Wilfer, correcting him, "it is the abode of conscious though independent Poverty."

Finding it rather difficult to pursue the conversation down this road, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin sat staring at mid-air, and Mrs. Wilfer sat silently giving them to understand that every breath she drew required to be drawn with a self-denial rarely paralleled in history, until Miss Bella appeared: whom Mrs. Wilfer presented, and to whom she explained the purpose of the visitors.

"I am much obliged to you, I am sure," said Miss Bella, coldly shaking her curls, "but I doubt if I have the inclination to go out at all."

"Bella!" Mrs. Wilfer admonished her; "Bella, you must conquer this."

"Yes, do what your ma says, and conquer it, my dear," urged Mrs. Boffin, "because we shall be so glad to have you, and because you are much too pretty to keep yourself shut up." With that, the pleasant creature gave her a kiss, and patted her on her dimpled shoulders; Mrs. Wilfer sitting stiffly by, like a functionary presiding over an interview previous to an execution.

"We are going to move into a nice house," said Mrs. Boffin, who was woman enough to compromise Mr. Boffin on that point, when he could n't very well contest it; "and we are going to set up a nice carriage, and we 'll go everywhere and see everything. And you must n't," seating Bella beside her, and patting her hand, "you must n't feel a dislike to us to begin with, because we could n't help it, you know, my dear."

With the natural tendency of youth to yield to candour and sweet temper, Miss Bella was so touched by the simplicity of this address that she frankly returned Mrs. Boffin's kiss. Not at all to the satisfaction of that good woman of the world, her mother, who sought to hold the advantageous ground of obliging the Boffins instead of being obliged.

"My youngest daughter, Lavinia," said Mrs. Wilfer, glad to make a diversion, as that young lady reappeared. "Mr. George Sampson, a friend of the family."

The friend of the family was in that stage of the tender passion which bound him to regard everybody else as the foe of the family. He put the round head of his cane in his mouth, like a stopper, when he sat down; as if he felt himself full to the throat with affronting sentiments. And he eyed the Boffins with implacable eyes.

"If you like to bring your sister with you when you come to stay with us," said Mrs. Boffin, "of course we shall be glad. The better you please yourself, Miss Bella, the better you 'll please us."

"Oh, my consent is of no consequence at all, I suppose?" cried Miss Lavinia.

"Lavvy," said her sister, in a low voice, "have the goodness to be seen and not heard."

"No, I won't," replied the sharp Lavinia. "I'm not a child, to be taken notice of by strangers."

"You *are* a child."

"I'm not a child, and I won't be taken notice of. 'Bring your sister,' indeed!"

"Lavinia!" said Mrs. Wilfer. "Hold! I will not allow you to utter in my presence the absurd suspicion that any strangers — I care not what their names — can patronise my child. Do you dare to suppose, you ridiculous girl, that Mr. and Mrs. Boffin would enter these doors on a patronising errand; or, if they did, would remain within them, only for one single instant, while your mother had the strength yet remaining in her vital frame to request them to depart? You little know your mother if you presume to think so."

"It 's all very fine," Lavinia began to grumble, when Mrs. Wilfer repeated: —

"Hold! I will not allow this. Do you not know what is due to guests? Do you not comprehend that in presuming to hint that this lady and gentleman could have any idea of patronising any member of your family — I care not which — you accuse them of an impertinence little less than insane?"

"Never mind me and Mrs. Boffin, ma'am," said Mr. Boffin, smilingly: "we don't care."

"Pardon me, but *I* do," returned Mrs. Wilfer.

Miss Lavinia laughed a short laugh as she muttered, "Yes, to be sure."

"And I require my audacious child," proceeded Mrs. Wilfer, with a withering look at her youngest, on whom it had not the slightest effect, "to please to be just to her sister Bella; to remember that her sister Bella is much sought after; and that when her sister Bella accepts an attention, she considers herself to be conferring qui-i-ite as much honour" — this with an indignant shiver — "as she receives."

But here Miss Bella repudiated, and said quietly, "I can speak for myself, you know, ma. You need n't bring *me* in, please."

"And it 's all very well aiming at others through convenient me," said the irrepressible Lavinia spitefully; "but I should like to ask George Sampson what *he* says to it."

"Mr. Sampson," proclaimed Mrs. Wilfer, seeing that young gentleman take his stopper out, and so darkly fixing him with her eyes as that he put it in again, — "Mr. Sampson, as a friend of this family and a frequenter of this house, is, I am persuaded, far too well bred to interpose on such an invitation."

This exaltation of the young gentleman moved the conscientious Mrs. Boffin to repentance for having done him an injustice in her mind, and consequently to saying that she and Mr. Boffin would any time be glad to see him; an attention which he handsomely acknowledged by replying, with his stopper unremoved, "Much obliged to you, but I'm always engaged, day and night."

However, Bella compensating for all drawbacks by responding to the advances of the Boffins in an engaging way, that easy pair were on the whole well satisfied, and proposed to the said Bella that as soon as they should be in a condition to receive her in a manner suitable to their desires, Mrs. Boffin should return with notice of the fact. This arrangement Mrs. Wilfer sanctioned with a stately inclination of her head and wave of her gloves, as who should say, "Your demerits shall be overlooked, and you shall be mercifully gratified, poor people."

"By the bye, ma'am," said Mr. Boffin, turning back as he was going, "you have a lodger?"

"A gentleman," Mrs. Wilfer answered, qualifying the low expression, "undoubtedly occupies our first floor."

"I may call him Our Mutual Friend," said Mr. Boffin.

"What sort of a fellow *is* Our Mutual Friend, now? Do you like him?"

"Mr. Rokesmith is very punctual, very quiet, a very eligible inmate."

"Because," Mr. Boffin explained, "you must know that I 'm not particularly well acquainted with Our Mutual Friend, for I have only seen him once. You give a good account of him. Is he at home?"

"Mr. Rokesmith is at home," said Mrs. Wilfer; "indeed," pointing through the window, "there he stands at the garden gate. Waiting for you, perhaps?"

"Perhaps so," replied Mr. Boffin. "Saw me come in, may be."

Bella had closely attended to this short dialogue. Accompanying Mrs. Boffin to the gate, she as closely watched what followed.

"How are you, sir, how are you?" said Mr. Boffin. "This is Mrs. Boffin. Mr. Rokesmith, that I told you of, my dear."

She gave him good day, and he bestirred himself and helped her to her seat, and the like, with a ready hand.

"Good-bye for the present, Miss Bella," said Mrs. Boffin, calling out a hearty parting. "We shall meet again soon! And then I hope I shall have my little John Harmon to show you."

Mr. Rokesmith, who was at the wheel adjusting the skirts of her dress, suddenly looked behind him, and around him, and then looked up at her, with a face so pale that Mrs. Boffin cried: —

"Gracious!" And after a moment, "What 's the matter, sir?"

"How can you show her the Dead?" returned Mr. Rokesmith.

"It 's only an adopted child. One I have told her of. One I 'm going to give the name to!"

"You took me by surprise," said Mr. Rokesmith, "and it sounded like an omen, that you should speak of showing the Dead to one so young and blooming."

Now Bella suspected by this time that Mr. Rokesmith admired her. Whether the knowledge (for it was rather that than suspicion) caused her to incline to him a little more, or a little less, than she had done at first; whether it rendered her

eager to find out more about him, because she sought to establish reason for her distrust, or because she sought to free him from it, was as yet dark to her own heart. But at most times he occupied a great amount of her attention, and she had set her attention closely on this incident.

That he knew it as well as she, she knew as well as he, when they were left together standing on the path by the garden gate.

"Those are worthy people, Miss Wilfer."

"Do you know them well?" asked Bella.

He smiled, reproaching her, and she coloured, reproaching herself, — both with the knowledge that she had meant to entrap him into an answer not true, — when he said, "I know *of* them."

"Truly, he told us he had seen you but once."

"Truly, I supposed he did."

Bella was nervous now, and would have been glad to recall her question.

"You thought it strange that, feeling much interested in you, I should start at what sounded like a proposal to bring you into contact with the murdered man who lies in his grave. I might have known — of course in a moment should have known — that it could not have that meaning. But my interest remains."

Re-entering the family-room in a meditative state, Miss Bella was received by the irrepressible Lavinia with:—

"There, Bella! At last I hope you have got your wishes realised — by your Boffins. You'll be rich enough now — with your Boffins. You can have as much flirting as you like — at your Boffins. But you won't take *me* to your Boffins, I can tell you — you and your Boffins too!"

"If," quoth Mr. George Sampson, moodily pulling his stopper out, "Miss Bella's Mr. Boffin comes any more of his nonsense to *me*, I only wish him to understand, as betwixt man and man, that he does it at his per"— and was going to say peril; but Miss Lavinia, having no confidence in his mental powers, and feeling his oration to have no definite application to any circumstances, jerked his stopper in again, with a sharpness that made his eyes water.

And now the worthy Mrs. Wilfer, having used her youngest daughter as a lay-figure for the edification of these Boffins, became bland to her, and proceeded to develop her last instance

of force of character, which was still in reserve. This was, to illuminate the family with her remarkable powers as a physiognomist; powers that terrified R. W. whenever let loose, as being always fraught with gloom and evil which no inferior prescience was aware of. And this Mrs. Wilfer now did, be it observed, in jealousy of these Boffins, in the very same moments when she was already reflecting how she would flourish these very same Boffins and the state they kept, over the heads of her Boffinless friends.

"Of their manners," said Mrs. Wilfer, "I say nothing. Of their appearance, I say nothing. Of the disinterestedness of their attentions towards Bella, I say nothing. But the craft, the secrecy, the dark, deep, underhanded plotting, written in Mrs. Boffin's countenance, make me shudder."

As an incontrovertible proof that those baleful attributes were all there, Mrs. Wilfer shuddered on the spot.

CHAPTER X

A MARRIAGE CONTRACT

THERE is excitement in the Veneering mansion. The mature young lady is going to be married (powder and all) to the mature young gentleman, and she is to be married from the Veneering house, and the Veneerings are to give the breakfast. The Analytical, who objects as a matter of principle to everything that occurs on the premises, necessarily objects to the match; but his consent has been dispensed with, and a spring-van is delivering its load of green-house plants at the door, in order that to-morrow's feast may be crowned with flowers.

The mature young lady is a lady of property. The mature young gentleman is a gentleman of property. He invests his property. He goes in a condescending amateurish way into the City, attends meetings of Directors, and has to do with traffic in Shares. As is well known to the wise in their generation, traffic in Shares is the one thing to have to do with in this world. Have no antecedents, no established character, no cultivation, no ideas, no manners; have Shares. Have Shares enough to be on Boards of Direction in capital letters, oscillate on mysterious business between London and Paris, and be great. Where does he come from? Shares. Where is he going to? Shares. What are his tastes? Shares. Has he any principles? Shares. What squeezes him into Parliament? Shares. Perhaps he never of himself achieved success in anything, never originated anything, never produced anything? Sufficient answer to all; Shares. Oh, mighty Shares! To set those blaring images so high, and to cause us smaller vermin, as under the influence of henbane or opium, to cry out, night and day, "Relieve us of our money, scatter it for us, buy us and sell us, ruin us, only we beseech ye take rank among the powers of the earth, and fatten on us!"

While the Loves and Graces have been preparing this torch for Hymen, which is to be kindled to-morrow, Mr. Twemlow

has suffered much in his mind. It would seem that both the mature young lady and the mature young gentleman must indubitably be Veneering's oldest friends. Wards of his, perhaps? Yet that can scarcely be, for they are older than himself. Veneering has been in their confidence throughout, and has done much to lure them to the altar. He has mentioned to Twemlow how he said to Mrs. Veneering, "Anastatia, this must be a match." He has mentioned to Twemlow how he regards Sophronia Akershem (the mature young lady) in the light of a sister, and Alfred Lammle (the mature young gentleman) in the light of a brother. Twemlow has asked him whether he went to school as a junior with Alfred? He has answered, "Not exactly." Whether Sophronia was adopted by his mother? He has answered, "Not precisely so." Twemlow's hand has gone to his forehead with a lost air.

But two or three weeks ago, Twemlow, sitting over his newspaper, and over his dry toast and weak tea, and over the stable-yard in Duke Street, St. James's, received a highly-perfumed cocked-hat and monogram from Mrs. Veneering, entreating her dearest Mr. T., if not particularly engaged that day, to come like a charming soul and make a fourth at dinner with dear Mr. Podsnap, for the discussion of an interesting family topic; the last three words doubly underlined and pointed with a note of admiration. And Twemlow, replying, "Not engaged, and more than delighted," goes, and this takes place: —

"My dear Twemlow," says Veneering, "your ready response to Anastatia's unceremonious invitation is truly kind, and like an old, old friend. You know our dear friend Podsnap?"

Twemlow ought to know the dear friend Podsnap who covered him with so much confusion, and he says he does know him, and Podsnap reciprocates. Apparently, Podsnap has been so wrought upon in a short time, as to believe that he has been intimate in the house many, many, many years. In the friendliest manner he is making himself quite at home with his back to the fire, executing a statuette of the Colossus at Rhodes. Twemlow has before noticed in his feeble way how soon the Veneering guests become infected with the Veneering fiction. Not, however, that he has the least notion of its being his own case.

"Our friends, Alfred and Sophronia," pursues Veneering the veiled prophet: "our friends Alfred and Sophronia, you will

be glad to hear, my dear fellows, are going to be married. As my wife and I make it a family affair the entire direction of which we take upon ourselves, of course our first step is to communicate the fact to our family friends."

("Oh!" thinks Twemlow, with his eyes on Podsnap, "then there are only two of us, and he 's the other.")

"I did hope," Veneering goes on, "to have had Lady Tippins to meet you; but she is always in request, and is unfortunately engaged."

("Oh!" thinks Twemlow, with his eyes wandering, "then there are three of us, and *she 's* the other.")

"Mortimer Lightwood," resumes Veneering, "whom you both know, is out of town; but he writes in his whimsical manner, that as we ask him to be bridegroom's best man when the ceremony takes place, he will not refuse, though he does n't see what he has to do with it."

("Oh!" thinks Twemlow, with his eyes rolling, "then there are four of us, and *he 's* the other.")

"Boots and Brewer," observes Veneering, "whom you also know, I have not asked to-day; but I reserve them for the occasion."

("Then," thinks Twemlow, with his eyes shut, "there are si —" But here collapses and does not completely recover until dinner is over and the Analytical has been requested to withdraw.)

"We now come," says Veneering, "to the point, the real point, of our little family consultation. Sophronia, having lost both father and mother, has no one to give her away."

"Give her away yourself," says Podsnap.

"My dear Podsnap, no. For three reasons. Firstly, because I could n't take so much upon myself when I have respected family friends to remember. Secondly, because I am not so vain as to think that I look the part. Thirdly, because Anastatia is a little superstitious on the subject, and feels averse to my giving away anybody until baby is old enough to be married."

"What would happen if he did?" Podsnap inquires of Mrs. Veneering.

"My dear Mr. Podsnap, it 's very foolish I know, but I have an instinctive presentiment that if Hamilton gave away anybody else first, he would never give away baby." Thus Mrs. Veneer-

ing; with her open hands pressed together, and each of her eight aquiline fingers looking so very like her one aquiline nose that the bran-new jewels on them seem necessary for distinction's sake.

"But, my dear Podsnap," quoth Veneering, "there *is* a tried friend of our family who, I think and hope you will agree with me, Podsnap, is the friend on whom this agreeable duty almost naturally devolves. That friend," saying the words as if the company were about a hundred and fifty in number, "is now among us. That friend is Twemlow."

"Certainly!" From Podsnap.

"That friend," Veneering repeats with greater firmness, "is our dear, good Twemlow. And I cannot sufficiently express to you, my dear Podsnap, the pleasure I feel in having this opinion of mine and Anastatia's so readily confirmed by you, that other equally familiar and tried friend who stands in the proud position — I mean who proudly stands in the position — or I ought rather to say, who places Anastatia and myself in the proud position of himself standing in the simple position — of baby's godfather." And, indeed, Veneering is much relieved in mind to find that Podsnap betrays no jealousy of Twemlow's elevation.

So, it has come to pass that the spring-van is strewing flowers on the rosy hours and on the staircase, and that Twemlow is surveying the ground on which he is to play his distinguished part to-morrow. He has already been to the church, and taken note of the various impediments in the aisle, under the auspices of an extremely dreary widow who opens the pews, and whose left hand appears to be in a state of acute rheumatism, but is in fact voluntarily doubled up to act as a money-box.

And now Veneering shoots out of the Study wherein he is accustomed, when contemplative, to give his mind to the carving and gilding of the Pilgrims going to Canterbury, in order to show Twemlow the little flourish he has prepared for the trumpets of fashion, describing how that on the seventeenth instant, at St. James's Church, the Reverend Blank Blank, assisted by the Reverend Dash Dash, united in the bonds of matrimony, Alfred Lammle, Esquire, of Sackville Street, Piccadilly, to Sophronia, only daughter of the late Horatio Akershem, Esquire, of Yorkshire. Also how the fair bride was married from the house of Hamilton Veneering, Esquire, of Stucconia,

and was given away by Melvin Twemlow, Esquire, of Duke Street, St. James's, second cousin to Lord Snigsworth, of Snigsworthy Park. While perusing which composition, Twemlow makes some opaque approach to perceiving that if the Reverend Blank Blank and the Reverend Dash Dash fail, after this introduction, to become enrolled in the list of Veneering's dearest and oldest friends, they will have none but themselves to thank for it.

After which, appears Sophronia (whom Twemlow has seen twice in his lifetime), to thank Twemlow for counterfeiting the late Horatio Akershem, Esquire, broadly of Yorkshire. And after her, appears Alfred (whom Twemlow has seen once in his lifetime), to do the same and to make a pasty sort of glitter, as if he were constructed for candle-light only, and had been let out into daylight by some grand mistake. And after that comes Mrs. Veneering, in a pervadingly aquiline state of figure, and with transparent little knobs on her temper, like the little transparent knob on the bridge of her nose, "Worn out by worry and excitement," as she tells her dear Mr. Twemlow, and reluctantly revived with curaçoa by the Analytical. And after that, the bridesmaids begin to come by railroad from various parts of the country, and to come like adorable recruits enlisted by a sergeant not present; for on arriving at the Veneering dépôt they are in a barrack of strangers.

So Twemlow goes home to Duke Street, St. James's, to take a plate of mutton broth with a chop in it, and a look at the marriage-service, in order that he may cut in at the right place to-morrow; and he is low, and feels it dull over the livery stable-yard, and is distinctly aware of a dint in his heart, made by the most adorable of the adorable bridesmaids. For the poor little harmless gentleman once had his fancy, like the rest of us, and she did n't answer (as she often does not), and he thinks the adorable bridesmaid is like the fancy as she was then (which she is not at all), and that if the fancy had not married some one else for money, but had married him for love, he and she would have been happy (which they would n't have been), and that she has a tenderness for him still (whereas her toughness is a proverb). Brooding over the fire, with his dried little head in his dried little hands, and his dried little elbows on his dried little knees, Twemlow is melancholy. "No Adorable to bear me company here!" thinks he. "No Adorable at the club!

A waste, a waste, a waste, my Twemlow!" And so drops asleep, and has galvanic starts all over him.

Betimes next morning, that horrible old Lady Tippins (relict of the late Sir Thomas Tippins, knighted in mistake for somebody else by His Majesty King George the Third, who, while performing the ceremony, was graciously pleased to observe, "What, what, what? Who, who, who? Why, why, why?") begins to be dyed and varnished for the interesting occasion. She has a reputation for giving smart accounts of things, and she must be at these people's early, my dear, to lose nothing of the fun. Whereabout in the bonnet and drapery announced by her name, any fragment of the real woman may be concealed, is perhaps known to her maid; but you could easily buy all you see of her, in Bond Street; or you might scalp her, and peel her, and scrape her, and make two Lady Tippinses out of her, and yet not penetrate to the genuine article. She has a large gold eye-glass, has Lady Tippins, to survey the proceedings with. If she had one in each eye, it might keep that other drooping lid up, and look more uniform. But perennial youth is in her artificial flowers, and her list of lovers is full.

"Mortimer, you wretch," says Lady Tippins, turning the eye-glass about and about, "where is your charge, the bridegroom?"

"Give you my honour," returns Mortimer, "I don't know, and I don't care."

"Miserable! Is that the way you do your duty?"

"Beyond an impression that he is to sit upon my knee and be seconded at some point of the solemnities, like a principal at a prize-fight, I assure you I have no notion what my duty is," returns Mortimer.

Eugene is also in attendance, with a pervading air upon him of having presupposed the ceremony to be a funeral, and of being disappointed. The scene is the Vestry-room of St. James's Church, with a number of leathery old registers on shelves, that might be bound in Lady Tippinses.

But, hark! A carriage at the gate, and Mortimer's man arrives, looking rather like a spurious Mephistopheles and an unacknowledged member of that gentleman's family. Whom Lady Tippins, surveying through her eye-glass, considers a fine man, and quite a catch; and of whom Mortimer remarks, in the lowest spirits, as he approaches, "I believe this is my fellow,

confound him!" More carriages at the gate, and lo, the rest of the characters. Whom Lady Tippins, standing on a cushion, surveying through the eye-glass, thus checks off: "Bride; five-and-forty if a day, thirty shillings a yard, veil fifteen pound, pocket-handkerchief a present. Bridesmaids; kept down for fear of outshining bride, consequently not girls, twelve and six-pence a yard, Veneering's flowers, snub-nose one rather pretty but too conscious of her stockings, bonnets three pound ten. Twemlow; blessed release for the dear man if she really was his daughter, nervous even under the pretence that she is, well he may be. Mrs. Veneering; never saw such velvet, say two thousand pounds as she stands, absolute jeweller's window, father must have been a pawnbroker, or how could these people do it? Attendants; unknown, poky."

Ceremony performed, register signed, Lady Tippins escorted out of sacred edifice by Veneering, carriages rolling back to Stucconia, servants with favours and flowers, Veneering's house reached, drawing-rooms most magnificent. Here, the Podsnaps await the happy party; Mr. Podsnap, with his hair-brushes made the most of; that imperial rocking-horse, Mrs. Podsnap, majestically skittish. Here, too, are Boots and Brewer, and the two other Buffers; each Buffer with a flower in his button-hole, his hair curled, and his gloves buttoned on tight, apparently come prepared, if anything had happened to the bridegroom, to be married instantly. Here, too, the bride's aunt and next relation; a widowed female of a Medusa sort, in a stony cap, glaring petrifaction at her fellow-creatures. Here, too, the bride's trustee; an oilcake-fed style of business-gentleman with moony spectacles, and an object of much interest. Veneering launching himself upon this trustee as his oldest friend (which makes seven, Twemlow thought), and confidentially retiring with him into the conservatory, it is understood that Veneering is his co-trustee, and that they are arranging about the fortune. Buffers are even overheard to whisper Thir-ty Thou-sand Pou-nds! with a smack and a relish suggestive of the very finest oysters. Poky unknowns, amazed to find how intimately they know Veneering, pluck up spirit, fold their arms, and begin to contradict him before breakfast. What time Mrs. Veneering, carrying baby dressed as a bridesmaid, flits about among the company, emitting flashes of many-coloured lightning from diamonds, emeralds, and rubies.

The Analytical, in course of time achieving what he feels to be due to himself in bringing to a dignified conclusion several quarrels he has on hand with the pastry-cook's men, announces breakfast. Dining-room no less magnificent than drawing-room; tables superb; all the camels out, and all laden. Splendid cake, covered with Cupids, silver, and true-lovers' knots. Splendid bracelet, produced by Veneering before going down, and clasped upon the arm of bride. Yet nobody seems to think much more of the Veneerings than if they were a tolerable landlord and landlady doing the thing in the way of business at so much a head. The bride and bridegroom talk and laugh apart, as has always been their manner; and the Buffers work their way through the dishes with systematic perseverance, as has always been *their* manner; and the poky unknowns are exceedingly benevolent to one another in invitations to take glasses of champagne; but Mrs. Podsnap, arching her mane and rocking her grandest, has a far more deferential audience than Mrs. Veneering; and Podsnap all but does the honours.

Another dismal circumstance is, that Veneering, having the captivating Tippins on one side of him and the bride's aunt on the other, finds it immensely difficult to keep the peace. For Medusa, besides unmistakingly glaring petrifaction at the fascinating Tippins, follows every lively remark made by that dear creature, with an audible snort; which may be referable to a chronic cold in the head, but may also be referable to indignation and contempt. And this snort being regular in its reproduction, at length comes to be expected by the company, who make embarrassing pauses when it is falling due, and by waiting for it, render it more emphatic when it comes. The stony aunt has likewise an injurious way of rejecting all dishes whereof Lady Tippins partakes; saying aloud when they are proffered to her, "No, no, no, not for me. Take it away!" As with a set purpose of implying a misgiving that if nourished upon similar meats, she might come to be like that charmer, which would be a fatal consummation. Aware of her enemy, Lady Tippins tries a youthful sally or two, and tries the eye-glass; but from the impenetrable cap and snorting armour of the stony aunt all weapons rebound powerless.

Another objectionable circumstance is, that the poky unknowns support each other in being unimpressible. They persist in not being frightened by the gold and silver camels,

and they are banded together to defy the elaborately chased ice pails. They even seem to unite in some vague utterance of the sentiment that the landlord and landlady will make a pretty good profit out of this, and they almost carry themselves like customers. Nor is there compensating influence in the adorable bridesmaids; for having very little interest in the bride, and none at all in one another, those lovely beings become, each one on her own account, depreciatingly contemplative of the millinery present; while the bridegroom's man, exhausted, in the back of his chair, appears to be improving the occasion by penitentially contemplating all the wrong he has ever done; the difference between him and his friend Eugene being, that the latter, in the back of *his* chair, appears to be contemplating all the wrong he would like to do — particularly to the present company.

In which state of affairs, the usual ceremonies rather droop and flag, and the splendid cake when cut by the fair hand of the bride has but an indigestible appearance. However, all the things indispensable to be said are said, and all the things indispensable to be done are done (including Lady Tippins's yawning, falling asleep, and waking insensible), and there is hurried preparation for the nuptial journey to the Isle of Wight, and the outer air teems with brass bands and spectators. In full sight of whom, the malignant star of the Analytical has preordained that pain and ridicule shall befall him. For he, standing on the door-steps to grace the departure, is suddenly caught a most prodigious thump on the side of his head with a heavy shoe, which a Buffer in the hall, champagne-flushed and wild of aim, has borrowed on the spur of the moment from the pastry-cook's porter, to cast after the departing pair as an auspicious omen.

So they all go up again into the gorgeous drawing-rooms, — all of them flushed with breakfast, as having taken scarlatina sociably, — and there the combined unknowns do malignant things with their legs to ottomans, and take as much as possible out of the splendid furniture. And so Lady Tippins, quite undetermined whether to-day is the day before yesterday, or the day after to-morrow, or the week after next, fades away; and Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene fade away, and Twemlow fades away, and the stony aunt goes away — she declines to fade, proving rock to the last, — and even the unknowns are slowly strained off, and it is all over.

All over, that is to say, for the time being. But there is another time to come, and it comes in about a fortnight, and it comes to Mr. and Mrs. Lammle on the sands at Shanklin, in the Isle of Wight.

Mr. and Mrs. Lammle have walked for some time on the Shanklin sands, and one may see by their footprints that they have not walked arm in arm, and that they have not walked in a straight track, and that they have walked in a moody humour; for the lady has prodded little spirting holes in the damp sand before her with her parasol, and the gentleman has trailed his stick after him. As if he were of the Mephistopheles family indeed, and had walked with a drooping tail.

"Do you mean to tell me, then, Sophronia —"

Thus he begins after a long silence, when Sophronia flashes fiercely, and turns upon him.

"Don't put it upon *me*, sir. I ask you, do *you* mean to tell me?"

Mr. Lammle falls silent again, and they walk as before. Mrs. Lammle opens her nostrils and bites her under-lip; Mr. Lammle takes his gingerous whiskers in his left hand, and, bringing them together, frowns furtively at his beloved, out of a thick gingerous bush.

"Do *I* mean to say!" Mrs. Lammle after a time repeats, with indignation. "Putting it on me! The unmanly disingenuousness!"

Mr. Lammle stops, releases his whiskers, and looks at her. "The what?"

Mrs. Lammle haughtily replies, without stopping, and without looking back, "The meanness."

He is at her side again in a pace or two, and he retorts, "That is not what you said. You said disingenuousness."

"What if I did?"

"There is no 'if' in the case. You did."

"I did then. And what of it?"

"What of it?" says Mr. Lammle. "Have you the face to utter the word to me?"

"The face, too!" replied Mrs. Lammle, staring at him with cold scorn. "Pray, how dare you, sir, utter the word to me?"

"I never did."

As this happens to be true, Mrs. Lammle is thrown on the

feminine resource of saying, "I don't care what you uttered or did not utter."

After a little more walking and a little more silence, Mr. Lammle breaks the latter.

"You shall proceed in your own way. You claim a right to ask me do I mean to tell you. Do I mean to tell you what?"

"That you are a man of property?"

"No."

"Then you married me on false pretences?"

"So be it. Next comes what you mean to say. Do you mean to say you are a woman of property?"

"No."

"Then you married me on false pretences."

"If you were so dull a fortune-hunter that you deceived yourself, or if you were so greedy and grasping that you were over-willing to be deceived by appearances, is it my fault, you adventurer?" the lady demands with great asperity.

"I asked Veneering, and he told me you were rich."

"Veneering!" with great contempt. "And what does Veneering know about me!"

"Was he not your trustee?"

"No. I have no trustee, but the one you saw on the day when you fraudulently married me. And his trust is not a very difficult one, for it is only an annuity of a hundred and fifteen pounds. I think there are some odd shillings or pence, if you are very particular."

Mr. Lammle bestows a by no means loving look upon the partner of his joys and sorrows, and he mutters something; but checks himself.

"Question for question. It is my turn again, Mrs. Lammle. What made you suppose me a man of property?"

"You made me suppose you so. Perhaps you will deny that you always presented yourself to me in that character?"

"But you asked somebody, too. Come, Mrs. Lammle, admission for admission. You asked somebody?"

"I asked Veneering."

"And Veneering knew as much of me as he knew of you, or as anybody knows of him."

After more silent walking, the bride stops short, to say in a passionate manner:—

"I never will forgive the Veneerings for this!"

"Neither will I," returns the bridegroom.

With that they walk again; she, making those angry spirts in the sand; he dragging that dejected tail. The tide is low, and seems to have thrown them together high on the bare shore. A gull comes sweeping by their heads, and flouts them. There was a golden surface on the brown cliffs but now, and behold they are only damp earth. A taunting roar comes from the sea, and the far-out rollers mount upon one another, to look at the entrapped impostors, and to join in impish and exultant gambols.

"Do you pretend to believe," Mrs. Lammle resumes sternly, "when you talk of my marrying you for worldly advantages, that it was within the bounds of reasonable probability that I would have married you for yourself?"

"Again there are two sides to the question, Mrs. Lammle. What do you pretend to believe?"

"So you first deceive me and then insult me!" cries the lady, with a heaving bosom.

"Not at all. I have originated nothing. The double-edged question was yours."

"Was mine!" the bride repeats, and her parasol breaks in her angry hand.

His colour has turned to a livid white, and ominous marks have come to light about his nose, as if the finger of the very devil himself had, within the last few moments, touched it here and there. But he has repressive power, and she has none.

"Throw it away," he coolly recommends as to the parasol; "you have made it useless; you look ridiculous with it."

Whereupon she calls him in her rage, "A deliberate villain," and so casts the broken thing from her as that it strikes him in falling. The finger-marks are something whiter for the instant, but he walks on at her side.

She bursts into tears, declaring herself the wretchedest, the most deceived, the worst used, of women. Then she says that if she had the courage to kill herself, she would do it. Then she calls him vile impostor. Then she asks him why, in the disappointment of his base speculation, he does not take her life with his own hand, under the present favourable circumstances. Then she cries again. Then she is enraged again, and makes some mention of swindlers. Finally, she sits down crying on a block of stone, and is in all the known and un-

known humours of her sex at once. Pending her changes, those aforesaid marks in his face have come and gone, now here, now there, like white stops of a pipe on which the diabolical performer has played a tune. Also his livid lips are parted at last, as if he were breathless with running. Yet he is not.

"Now, get up, Mrs. Lammle, and let us speak reasonably."

She sits upon her stone, and takes no heed of him.

"Get up, I tell you."

Raising her head, she looks contemptuously in his face, and repeats, "You tell me! Tell me, forsooth!"

She affects not to know that his eyes are fastened on her as she droops her head again; but her whole figure reveals that she knows it uneasily.

"Enough of this. Come! Do you hear? Get up."

Yielding to his hand, she rises, and they walk again; but this time with their faces turned towards their place of residence.

"Mrs. Lammle, we have both been deceiving, and we have both been deceived. We have both been biting, and we have both been bitten. In a nutshell, there's the state of the case."

"You sought me out —"

"Tut! Let us have done with that. *We* know very well how it was. Why should you and I talk about it, when you and I can't disguise it? To proceed. I am disappointed and cut a poor figure."

"Am I no one?"

"Some one — and I was coming to you, if you had waited a moment. You, too, are disappointed, and cut a poor figure."

"An injured figure!"

"You are now cool enough, Sophronia, to see that you can't be injured without my being equally injured; and that therefore the mere word is not to the purpose. When I look back, I wonder how I can have been such a fool as to take you to so great an extent upon trust."

"And when I look back —" the bride cries, interrupting.

"And when you look back, you wonder how you can have been — you 'll excuse the word?"

"Most certainly, with so much reason."

"— Such a fool as to take *me* to so great an extent upon

trust. But the folly is committed on both sides. I cannot get rid of you; you cannot get rid of me. What follows?"

"Shame and misery," the bride bitterly replies.

"I don't know. A mutual understanding follows, and I think it may carry us through. Here I split my discourse (give me your arm, Sophronia) into three heads, to make it shorter and plainer. Firstly, it's enough to have been done, without the mortification of being known to have been done. So we agree to keep the fact to ourselves. You agree?"

"If it is possible, I do."

"Possible! We have pretended well enough to one another. Can't we, united, pretend to the world? Agreed. Secondly, we owe the Veneerings a grudge, and we owe all other people the grudge of wishing them to be taken in, as we ourselves have been taken in. Agreed?"

"Yes. Agreed."

"We come smoothly to thirdly. You have called me an adventurer, Sophronia. So I am. In plain uncomplimentary English, so I am. So are you, my dear. So are many people. We agree to keep our own secret, and to work together in furtherance of our own schemes."

"What schemes?"

"Any scheme that will bring us money. By our own schemes, I mean our joint interest. Agreed?"

She answers, after a little hesitation, "I suppose so. Agreed."

"Carried at once, you see! Now, Sophronia, only half a dozen words more. We know one another perfectly. Don't be tempted into twitting me with the past knowledge that you have of me, because it is identical with the past knowledge I have of you, and in twitting me, you twit yourself, and I don't want to hear you do it. With this good understanding established between us, it is better never done. To wind up all. — You have shown temper to-day, Sophronia. Don't be betrayed into doing so again, because I have a Devil of a temper myself."

So, the happy pair, with this hopeful marriage contract thus signed, sealed, and delivered, repair homeward. If, when those infernal finger-marks were on the white and breathless countenance of Alfred Lammle, Esquire, they denoted that he conceived the purpose of subduing his dear wife Mrs. Alfred

Lammle, by at once divesting her of any lingering reality or pretence of self-respect, the purpose would seem to have been presently executed. The mature young lady has mighty little need of powder, now, for her downcast face, as he escorts her in the light of the setting sun to their abode of bliss.

CHAPTER XI

PODSNAPPERY

Mr. Podsnap was well to do, and stood very high in Mr. Podsnap's opinion. Beginning with a good inheritance, he had married a good inheritance, and had thriven exceedingly in the Marine Insurance way, and was quite satisfied. He never could make out why everybody was not quite satisfied, and he felt conscious that he set a brilliant social example in being particularly well satisfied with most things, and, above all other things, with himself.

Thus happily acquainted with his own merit and importance, Mr. Podsnap settled that whatever he put behind him he put out of existence. There was a dignified conclusiveness — not to add a grand convenience — in this way of getting rid of disagreeables which had done much towards establishing Mr. Podsnap in his lofty place in Mr. Podsnap's satisfaction. "I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it!" Mr. Podsnap had even acquired a peculiar flourish of his right arm in often clearing the world of its most difficult problems, by sweeping them behind him (and consequently sheer away) with those words and a flushed face. For they affronted him.

Mr. Podsnap's world was not a very large world, morally; no, nor even geographically: seeing that although his business was sustained upon commerce with other countries, he considered other countries, with that important reservation, a mistake, and of their manners and customs would conclusively observe, "Not English!" when, Presto! with a flourish of the arm, and a flush of the face, they were swept away. Elsewise, the world got up at eight, shaved close at a quarter-past, breakfasted at nine, went to the City at ten, came home at half-past five, and dined at seven. Mr. Podsnap's notions of the Arts in their integrity might have been stated thus. Literature; large print, respectfully descriptive of getting up at eight, shaving

close at a quarter-past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. Painting and Sculpture; models and portraits representing Professors of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter-past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. Music; a respectable performance (without variations) on stringed and wind instruments, sedately expressive of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter-past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. Nothing else to be permitted to those same vagrants the Arts, on pain of excommunication. Nothing else To Be — anywhere!

As a so eminently respectable man, Mr. Podsnap was sensible of its being required of him to take Providence under his protection. Consequently he always knew exactly what Providence meant. Inferior and less respectable men might fall short of that mark, but Mr. Podsnap was always up to it. And it was very remarkable (and must have been very comfortable) that what Providence meant was invariably what Mr. Podsnap meant.

These may be said to have been the articles of a faith and school which the present chapter takes the liberty of calling, after its representative man, Podsnappery. They were confined within close bounds, as Mr. Podsnap's own head was confined by his shirt-collar; and they were enunciated with a sounding pomp that smacked of the creaking of Mr. Podsnap's own boots.

There was a Miss Podsnap. And this young rocking-horse was being trained in her mother's art of prancing in a stately manner without ever getting on. But the high parental action was not yet imparted to her, and in truth she was but an undersized damsel, with high shoulders, low spirits, chilled elbows, and a rasped surface of nose, who seemed to take occasional frosty peeps out of childhood into womanhood, and to shrink back again, overcome by her mother's head-dress and her father from head to foot — crushed by the mere dead-weight of Podsnappery.

A certain institution in Mr. Podsnap's mind which he called "the young person" may be considered to have been embodied in Miss Podsnap, his daughter. It was an inconvenient and exacting institution, as requiring everything in the universe to be

filed down and fitted to it. The question about everything was, would it bring a blush into the cheek of the young person? And the inconvenience of the young person was, that, according to Mr. Podsnap, she seemed always liable to burst into blushes when there was no need at all. There appeared to be no line of demarcation between the young person's excessive innocence, and another person's guiltiest knowledge. Take Mr. Podsnap's word for it, and the soberest tints of drab, white, lilac, and grey, were all flaming red to this troublesome Bull of a young person.

The Podsnaps lived in a shady angle adjoining Portman Square. They were a kind of people certain to dwell in the shade, wherever they dwelt. Miss Podsnap's life had been, from her first appearance on this planet, altogether of a shady order; for, Mr. Podsnap's young person was likely to get little good out of association with other young persons, and had therefore been restricted to companionship with not very congenial older persons, and with massive furniture. Miss Podsnap's early views of life being principally derived from the reflections of it in her father's boots, and in the walnut and rosewood tables of the dim drawing-rooms, and in their swarthy giants of looking-glasses, were of a sombre cast; and it was not wonderful that now, when she was on most days solemnly tooled through the Park by the side of her mother in a great, tall, custard-coloured phaeton, she showed above the apron of that vehicle like a dejected young person sitting up in bed to take a startled look at things in general, and very strongly desiring to get her head under the counterpane again.

Said Mr. Podsnap to Mrs. Podsnap, "Georgiana is almost eighteen."

Said Mrs. Podsnap to Mr. Podsnap, assenting, "Almost eighteen."

Said Mr. Podsnap then to Mrs. Podsnap, "Really I think we should have some people on Georgiana's birthday."

Said Mrs. Podsnap then to Mr. Podsnap, "Which will enable us to clear off all those people who are due."

So it came to pass that Mr. and Mrs. Podsnap requested the honour of the company of seventeen friends of their souls at dinner; and that they substituted other friends of their souls for such of the seventeen original friends of their souls as deeply regretted that a prior engagement prevented their having the

honour of dining with Mr. and Mrs. Podsnap, in pursuance of their kind invitation; and that Mrs. Podsnap said of all these inconsolable personages, as she checked them off with a pencil in her list, "Asked, at any rate, and got rid of;" and that they successfully disposed of a good many friends of their souls in this way, and felt their consciences much lightened.

There were still other friends of their souls who were not entitled to be asked to dinner, but had a claim to be invited to come and take a haunch of mutton vapour-bath at half-past nine. For the clearing off of these worthies, Mrs. Podsnap added a small and early evening to the dinner, and looked in at the music-shop to bespeak a well-conducted automaton to come and play quadrilles for a carpet dance.

Mr. and Mrs. Veneering, and Mr. and Mrs. Veneering's brannew bride and bridegroom, were of the dinner company; but the Podsnap establishment had nothing else in common with the Veneerings. Mr. Podsnap could tolerate taste in a mushroom man who stood in need of that sort of thing, but was far above it himself. Hideous solidity was the characteristic of the Podsnap plate. Everything was made to look as heavy as it could, and to take up as much room as possible. Everything said boastfully, "Here you have as much of me in my ugliness as if I were only lead; but I am so many ounces of precious metal worth so much an ounce; — would n't you like to melt me down?" A corpulent straddling epergne, blotched all over it as if it had broken out in an eruption rather than been ornamented, delivered this address from an unsightly silver platform in the centre of the table. Four silver wine-coolers, each furnished with four staring heads, each head obtrusively carrying a big silver ring in each of its ears, conveyed the sentiment up and down the table, and handed it on to the pot-bellied silver salt-cellars. All the big silver spoons and forks widened the mouths of the company expressly for the purpose of thrusting the sentiment down their throats with every morsel they ate.

The majority of the guests were like the plate, and included several heavy articles weighing ever so much. But there was a foreign gentleman among them: whom Mr. Podsnap had invited after much debate with himself — believing the whole European continent to be in mortal alliance against the young person — and there was a droll disposition, not only on the part

of Mr. Podsnap, but of everybody else, to treat him as if he were a child who was hard of hearing.

As a delicate concession to this unfortunately-born foreigner, Mr. Podsnap, in receiving him, had presented his wife as "Madame Podsnap"; also his daughter as "Mademoiselle Podsnap," with some inclination to add "ma fille," in which bold venture, however, he checked himself. The Veneerings being at that time the only other arrivals, he had added (in a condescendingly explanatory manner), "Monsieur Vey-nair-reeng," and had then subsided into English.

"How Do You Like London?" Mr. Podsnap now inquired from his station of host, as if he were administering something in the nature of a powder or potion to the deaf child; "London, Londres, London?"

The foreign gentleman admired it.

"You find it Very Large?" said Mr. Podsnap, spaciously.

The foreign gentleman found it very large.

"And Very Rich?"

The foreign gentleman found it, without doubt, énormément riche.

"Enormously Rich, We say," returned Mr. Podsnap, in a condescending manner. "Our English adverbs do Not terminate in Mong, and We Pronounce the 'ch' as if there were a 't' before it. We Say Ritch."

"Reetch," remarked the foreign gentleman.

"And Do You Find, Sir," pursued Mr. Podsnap, with dignity, "Many Evidences that Strike You, of our British Constitution in the Streets Of The World's Metropolis, London, Londres, London?"

The foreign gentleman begged to be pardoned, but did not altogether understand.

"The Constitution Britannique," Mr. Podsnap explained, as if he were teaching in an infant school. "We Say British, But You Say Britannique, You Know" (forgivingly, as if that were not his fault). "The Constitution, Sir."

The foreign gentleman said, "Mais, yees; I know eem."

A youngish, sallowish gentleman in spectacles, with a lumpy forehead, seated in a supplementary chair at a corner of the table, here caused a profound sensation by saying, in a raised voice, "Esker," and then stopping dead.

"Mais oui," said the foreign gentleman, turning towards him. "Est-ce que? Quoi donc?"

But the gentleman with the lumpy forehead, having for the time delivered himself of all that he found behind his lumps, spake for the time no more.

"I Was Inquiring," said Mr. Podsnap, resuming the thread of his discourse, "Whether You Have Observed in our Streets as We should say, Upon our Pavvy as You would say, any Tokens —"

The foreign gentleman, with patient courtesy entreated pardon; "But what was tokenz?"

"Marks," said Mr. Podsnap; "Signs, you know, Appearances — Traces."

"Ah! of a Orse?" inquired the foreign gentleman.

"We call it Horse," said Mr. Podsnap, with forbearance. "In England, Angleterre, England, We Aspirate the 'H,' and We Say 'Horse.' Only our Lower Classes Say 'Orse!'"

"Pardon," said the foreign gentleman; "I am alwiz wrong!"

"Our Language," said Mr. Podsnap, with a gracious consciousness of being always right, "is Difficult. Ours is a Copious Language, and Trying to Strangers. I will not Pursue my Question."

But the lumpy gentleman, unwilling to give it up, again madly said, "Esker," and again spake no more.

"It merely referred," Mr. Podsnap explained, with a sense of meritorious proprietorship, "to Our Constitution, Sir. We Englishmen are Very Proud of our Constitution, Sir. It Was Bestowed Upon Us By Providence. No Other Country is so Favoured as This Country."

"And ozer countries? —" the foreign gentleman was beginning, when Mr. Podsnap put him right again.

"We do not say Ozer; we say Other: the letters are 'T' and 'H;' You say Tay and Aish, You Know; (still with clemency). The sound is 'th' — 'th!'"

"And o*th*er countries," said the foreign gentleman. "They do how?"

"They do, Sir," returned Mr. Podsnap, gravely shaking his head; "they do — I am sorry to be obliged to say it — *as* they do."

"It was a little particular of Providence," said the foreign gentleman, laughing; "for the frontier is not large."

"Undoubtedly," assented Mr. Podsnap; "But So it is. It

was the Charter of the Land. This Island was Blest, Sir, to the Direct Exclusion of such Other Countries as — as there may happen to be. And if we were all Englishmen present, I would say," added Mr. Podsnap, looking round upon his compatriots, and sounding solemnly with his theme, "that there is in the Englishman a combination of qualities, a modesty, an independence, a responsibility, a repose, combined with an absence of everything calculated to call a blush into the cheek of a young person, which one would seek in vain among the Nations of the Earth."

Having delivered this little summary, Mr. Podsnap's face flushed as he thought of the remote possibility of its being at all qualified by any prejudiced citizen of any other country; and, with his favourite right-arm flourish, he put the rest of Europe and the whole of Asia, Africa, and America nowhere.

The audience were much edified by this passage of words; and Mr. Podsnap, feeling that he was in rather remarkable force to-day, became smiling and conversational.

"Has anything more been heard, Veneering," he inquired, "of the lucky legatee?"

"Nothing more," returned Veneering, "than that he has come into possession of the property. I am told people now call him The Golden Dustman. I mentioned to you some time ago, I think, that the young lady whose intended husband was murdered is daughter to a clerk of mine?"

"Yes, you told me that," said Podsnap; "and by the bye I wish you would tell it again here, for it's a curious coincidence — curious that the first news of the discovery should have been brought straight to your table (when I was there), and curious that one of your people should have been so nearly interested in it. Just relate that, will you?"

Veneering was more than ready to do it, for he had prospered exceedingly upon the Harmon Murder, and had turned the social distinction it conferred upon him to the account of making several dozen of bran-new bosom friends. Indeed, such another lucky hit would almost have set him up in that way to his satisfaction. So addressing himself to the most desirable of his neighbours, while Mrs. Veneering secured the next most desirable, he plunged into the case, and emerged from it twenty minutes afterwards with a Bank Director in his arms. In the mean time, Mrs. Veneering had dived into the same waters for

a wealthy Ship-Broker, and had brought him up, safe and sound, by the hair. Then Mrs. Veneering had to relate, to a larger circle, how she had been to see the girl, and how she was really pretty, and (considering her station) presentable. And this she did with such a successful display of her eight aquiline fingers and their encircling jewels, that she happily laid hold of a drifting General Officer, his wife and daughter, and not only restored their animation, which had become suspended, but made them lively friends within an hour.

Although Mr. Podsnap would in a general way have highly disapproved of Bodies in rivers as ineligible topics with reference to the cheek of the young person, he had, as one may say, a share in this affair which made him a part proprietor. As its returns were immediate, too, in the way of restraining the company from speechless contemplation of the wine-coolers, it paid, and he was satisfied.

And now the haunch of mutton vapour-bath having received a gamey infusion, and a few last touches of sweets and coffee, was quite ready, and the bathers came; but not before the discreet automaton had got behind the bars of the piano music-desk, and there presented the appearance of a captive languishing in a rosewood jail. And who now so pleasant or so well assorted as Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lammle, he all sparkle, she all gracious contentment, both at occasional intervals exchanging looks like partners at cards who played a game against All England.

There was not much youth among the bathers, but there was no youth (the young person always excepted) in the articles of Podsnappery. Bald bathers folded their arms and talked to a Mr. Podsnap on the hearth-rug; sleek-whiskered bathers, with hats in their hands, lunged at Mrs. Podsnap and retreated; prowling bathers went about looking into ornamental boxes and bowls as if they had suspicions of larceny on the part of the Podsnaps, and expected to find something they had lost at the bottom; bathers of the gentler sex sat silently comparing ivory shoulders. All this time and always, poor little Miss Podsnap, whose tiny efforts (if she had made any) were swallowed up in the magnificence of her mother's rocking, kept herself as much out of sight and mind as she could, and appeared to be counting on many dismal returns of the day. It was somehow understood, as a secret article in the state proprieties of Podsnappery, that nothing must be said about the

day. Consequently this young damsel's nativity was hushed up and looked over, as if it were agreed on all hands that it would have been better that she had never been born.

The Lammles were so fond of the dear Veneerings that they could not for some time detach themselves from those excellent friends; but at length either a very open smile on Mr. Lammle's part, or a very secret elevation of one of his gingerous eyebrows, — certainly the one or the other, — seemed to say to Mrs. Lammle, "Why don't you play?" And so, looking about her, she saw Miss Podsnap, and seeming to say responsively, "That card?" and to be answered, "Yes," went and sat beside Miss Podsnap.

Mrs. Lammle was overjoyed to escape into a corner for a little quiet talk.

It promised to be a very quiet talk, for Miss Podsnap replied in a flutter, "Oh! Indeed, it 's very kind of you, but I am afraid I *don't* talk."

"Let us make a beginning," said the insinuating Mrs. Lammle, with her best smile.

"Oh! I am afraid you 'll find me very dull. But ma talks!"

That was plainly to be seen, for ma was talking then at her usual canter, with arched head and mane, opened eyes and nostrils.

"Fond of reading, perhaps?"

"Yes. At least I — don't mind that so much," returned Miss Podsnap.

"M—m—m—m—music." So insinuating was Mrs. Lammle that she got half a dozen ms into the word before she got it out.

"I have n't nerve to play even if I could. Ma plays."

(At exactly the same canter, and with a certain flourishing appearance of doing something, ma did, in fact, occasionally take a rock upon the instrument.)

"Of course you like dancing?"

"Oh no, I don't," said Miss Podsnap.

"No? With your youth and attractions? Truly, my dear, you surprise me!"

"I can't say," observed Miss Podsnap, after hesitating considerably, and stealing several timid looks at Mrs. Lammle's carefully arranged face, "how I might have liked it if I had been a — you won't mention it, *will* you?"

"My dear! Never!"

"No, I am sure you won't. I can't say then how I should have liked it, if I had been a chimney-sweep on May-day."

"Gracious!" was the exclamation which amazement elicited from Mrs. Lammle.

"There! I knew you'd wonder. But you won't mention it, will you?"

"Upon my word, my love," said Mrs. Lammle, "you make me ten times more desirous, now I talk to you, to know you well than I was when I sat over yonder looking at you. How I wish we could be real friends! Try me as a real friend. Come! Don't fancy me a frumpy old married woman, my dear; I was married but the other day, you know; I am dressed as a bride now, you see. About the chimney-sweeps?"

"Hush! Ma 'll hear."

"She can't hear from where she sits."

"Don't you be too sure of that," said Miss Podsnap, in a lower voice. "Well, what I mean is, that they seem to enjoy it."

"And that perhaps you would have enjoyed it, if you had been one of them?"

Miss Podsnap nodded significantly.

"Then you don't enjoy it now?"

"How is it possible?" said Miss Podsnap. "Oh it is such a dreadful thing! If I was wicked enough — and strong enough — to kill anybody, it should be my partner."

This was such an entirely new view of the Terpsichorean art as socially practised, that Mrs. Lammle looked at her young friend in some astonishment. Her young friend sat nervously twiddling her fingers in a pinioned attitude, as if she were trying to hide her elbows. But this latter Utopian object (in short sleeves) always appeared to be the great inoffensive aim of her existence.

"It sounds horrid, don't it?" said Miss Podsnap, with a penitential face.

Mrs. Lammle, not very well knowing what to answer, resolved herself into a look of smiling encouragement.

"But it is, and it always has been," pursued Miss Podsnap, "such a trial to me! I so dread being awful. And it is so awful! No one knows what I suffered at Madame Sauteuse's, where I learnt to dance and make presentation-curtseys, and other dreadful things — or at least where they tried to teach me. Ma can do it."

"At any rate, my love," said Mrs. Lammle soothingly, "that 's over."

"Yes, it 's over," returned Miss Podsnap, "but there 's nothing gained by that. It 's worse here than at Madame Sauteuse's. Ma was there, and ma 's here; but pa was n't there, and company was n't there, and there were not real partners there. Oh there 's ma speaking to the man at the piano! Oh there 's ma going up to somebody! Oh I know she 's going to bring him to me! Oh please don't, please don't, please don't! Oh keep away, keep away, keep away!" These pious ejaculations Miss Podsnap uttered with her eyes closed, and her head leaning back against the wall.

But the Ogre advanced under the pilotage of ma, and ma said, "Georgiana, Mr. Grompus," and the Ogre clutched his victim and bore her off to his castle in the top couple. Then the discreet automaton who had surveyed his ground, played a blossomless tuneless "set," and sixteen disciples of Podsnappery went through the figures of — 1, Getting up at eight and shaving close at a quarter past — 2, Breakfasting at nine — 3, Going to the City at ten — 4, Coming home at half-past five — 5, Dining at seven, and the grand chain.

While these solemnities were in progress, Mr. Alfred Lammle (most loving of husbands) approached the chair of Mrs. Alfred Lammle (most loving of wives), and bending over the back of it, trifled for some few seconds with Mrs. Lammle's bracelet. Slightly in contrast with this brief airy toying, one might have noticed a certain dark attention in Mrs. Lammle's face as she said some words with her eyes on Mr. Lammle's waistcoat, and seemed in return to receive some lesson. But it was all done as a breath passes from a mirror.

And now, the grand chain riveted to the last link, the discreet automaton ceased, and the sixteen, two and two, took a walk among the furniture. And herein the unconsciousness of the Ogre Grompus was pleasantly conspicuous; for that complacent monster, believing that he was giving Miss Podsnap a treat, prolonged to the utmost stretch of possibility a peripatetic account of an archery meeting; while his victim, heading the procession of sixteen as it slowly circled about, like a revolving funeral, never raised her eyes except once to steal a glance at Mrs. Lammle, expressive of intense despair.

At length the procession was dissolved by the violent arrival

of a nutmeg, before which the drawing-room door bounced open as if it were a cannon-ball; and while that fragrant article, dispersed through several glasses of coloured warm water, was going the round of society, Miss Podsnap returned to her seat by her new friend.

"Oh my goodness," said Miss Podsnap. "*That's* over! I hope you did n't look at me."

"My dear, why not?"

"Oh I know all about myself," said Miss Podsnap.

"I 'll tell you something *I* know about you, my dear," returned Mrs. Lammle in her winning way, "and that is, you are most unnecessarily shy."

"Ma ain't," said Miss Podsnap. — "I detest you! Go along!" This shot was levelled under her breath at the gallant Grompus for bestowing an insinuating smile upon her in passing.

"Pardon me if I scarcely see, my dear Miss Podsnap," Mrs. Lammle was beginning when the young lady interposed.

"If we are going to be real friends (and I suppose we are, for you are the only person who ever proposed it), don't let us be awful. It's awful enough to *be* Miss Podsnap, without being called so. Call me Georgiana."

"Dearest Georgiana," Mrs. Lammle began again.

"Thank you," said Miss Podsnap.

"Dearest Georgiana, pardon me if I scarcely see, my love, why your mamma's not being shy is a reason why you should be."

"Don't you really see that?" asked Miss Podsnap, plucking at her fingers in a troubled manner, and furtively casting her eyes now on Mrs. Lammle, now on the ground. "Then perhaps it is n't?"

"My dearest Georgiana, you defer much too readily to my poor opinion. Indeed, it is not even an opinion, darling, for it is only a confession of my dulness."

"Oh *you* are not dull," returned Miss Podsnap. "*I* am dull, but you could n't have made me talk if you were."

Some little touch of conscience answering this perception of her having gained a purpose, called bloom enough into Mrs. Lammle's face to make it look brighter as she sat smiling her best smile on her dear Georgiana, and shaking her head with an affectionate playfulness. Not that it meant anything, but that Georgiana seemed to like it.

"What I mean is," pursued Georgiana, "that ma being so endowed with awfulness, and pa being so endowed with awfulness, and there being so much awfulness everywhere — I mean, at least, everywhere where I am — perhaps it makes me who am so deficient in awfulness, and frightened at it — I say it very badly — I don't know whether you can understand what I mean?"

"Perfectly, dearest Georgiana!" Mrs. Lammle was proceeding with every reassuring wile, when the head of that young lady suddenly went back against the wall again and her eyes closed.

"Oh there 's ma being awful with somebody with a glass in his eye! Oh I know she 's going to bring him here! Oh don't bring him, don't bring him! Oh he 'll be my partner with his glass in his eye! Oh what shall I do!" This time Georgiana accompanied her ejaculations with taps of her feet upon the floor, and was altogether in quite a desperate condition. But there was no escape from the majestic Mrs. Podsnap's production of an ambling stranger, with one eye screwed up into extinction and the other framed and glazed, who, having looked down out of that organ, as if he descried Miss Podsnap at the bottom of some perpendicular shaft, brought her to the surface, and ambled off with her. And then the captive at the piano played another "set," expressive of his mournful aspirations after freedom, and other sixteen went through the former melancholy motions, and the ambler took Miss Podsnap for a furniture walk, as if he had struck out an entirely original conception.

In the mean time, a stray personage of a meek demeanour, who had wandered to the hearth-rug and got among the heads of tribes assembled there in conference with Mr. Podsnap, eliminated Mr. Podsnap's flush and flourish by a highly unpolite remark; no less than a reference to the circumstance that some half-dozen people had lately died in the streets, of starvation. It was clearly ill-timed after dinner. It was not adapted to the cheek of the young person. It was not in good taste.

"I don't believe it," said Mr. Podsnap, putting it behind him.

The meek man was afraid we must take it as proved, because there were the Inquests and the Registrar's returns.

"Then it was their own fault," said Mr. Podsnap.

Veneering and other elders of tribes commended this way out of it. At once a short cut and a broad road.

The man of meek demeanour intimated that truly it would seem from the facts, as if starvation had been forced upon the culprits in question — as if, in their wretched manner, they had made their weak protests against it — as if they would have taken the liberty of staving it off if they could — as if they would rather not have been starved upon the whole, if perfectly agreeable to all parties.

"There is not," said Mr. Podsnap, flushing angrily, — "there is not a country in the world, sir, where so noble a provision is made for the poor as in this country."

The meek man was quite willing to concede that, but perhaps it rendered the matter even worse, as showing that there must be something appallingly wrong somewhere.

"Where?" said Mr. Podsnap.

The meek man hinted, Would n't it be well to try, very seriously, to find out where?

"Ah!" said Mr. Podsnap. "Easy to say somewhere; not so easy to say where! But I see what you are driving at. I knew it from the first. Centralisation. No. Never with my consent. Not English."

An approving murmur arose from the heads of tribes; as saying, "There you have him! Hold him!"

He was not aware (the meek man submitted of himself) that he was driving at any isation. He had no favourite isation that he knew of. But he certainly was more staggered by these terrible occurrences than he was by names, of howsoever so many syllables. Might he ask, was dying of destitution and neglect necessarily English?

"You know what the population of London is, I suppose?" said Mr. Podsnap.

The meek man supposed he did, but supposed that had absolutely nothing to do with it, if its laws were well administered.

"And you know, at least I hope you know," said Mr. Podsnap, with severity, "that Providence has declared that you shall have the poor always with you?"

The meek man also hoped he knew that.

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Podsnap, with a portentous

air. "I am glad to hear it. It will render you cautious how you fly in the face of Providence."

In reference to that absurd and irreverent conventional phrase, the meek man said, for which Mr. Podsnap was not responsible, he the meek man had no fear of doing anything so impossible; but —

But Mr. Podsnap felt that the time had come for flushing and flourishing this meek man down for good. So he said: —

"I must decline to pursue this painful discussion. It is not pleasant to my feelings; it is repugnant to my feelings. I have said that I do not admit these things. I have also said that if they do occur (not that I admit it), the fault lies with the sufferers themselves. It is not for *me*" — Mr. Podsnap pointed "me" forcibly, as adding by implication though it may be all very well for *you* — "it is not for me to impugn the workings of Providence. I know better than that, I trust, and I have mentioned what the intentions of Providence are. Besides," said Mr. Podsnap, flushing high up among his hair-brushes, with a strong consciousness of personal affront, "the subject is a very disagreeable one. I will go so far as to say it is an odious one. It is not one to be introduced among our wives and young persons, and I —" He finished with that flourish of his arm which added more expressively than any words, And I remove it from the face of the earth.

Simultaneously with this quenching of the meek man's ineffectual fire, Georgiana having left the ambler up a lane of sofa, in a No Thoroughfare of back drawing-room, to find his own way out, came back to Mrs. Lammle. And who should be with Mrs. Lammle, but Mr. Lammle. So fond of her!

"Alfred, my love, here is my friend. Georgiana, dearest girl, you must like my husband next to me."

Mr. Lammle was proud to be so soon distinguished by this special commendation to Miss Podsnap's favour. But if Mr. Lammle were prone to be jealous of his dear Sophronia's friendships, he would be jealous of her feeling towards Miss Podsnap.

"Say Georgiana, darling," interposed his wife.

"Towards — shall I? — Georgiana." Mr. Lammle uttered the name, with a delicate curve of his right hand, from his lips outward. "For never have I known Sophronia (who is not apt to take sudden likings) so attracted and so captivated as she is by — shall I once more? — Georgiana."

The object of this homage sat uneasily enough in receipt of it, and then said, turning to Mrs. Lammle, much embarrassed: —

"I wonder what you like me for! I am sure I can't think."

"Dearest Georgiana, for yourself. For your difference from all around you."

"Well! That may be. For I think I like you for your difference from all around me," said Georgiana, with a smile of relief.

"We must be going with the rest," observed Mrs. Lammle, rising with a show of unwillingness, amidst a general dispersal. "We are real friends, Georgiana dear?"

"Real."

"Good night, dear girl!"

She had established an attraction over the shrinking nature upon which her smiling eyes were fixed, for Georgiana held her hand while she answered in a secret and half-frightened tone: —

"Don't forget me when you are gone away. And come again soon. Good night!"

Charming to see Mr. and Mrs. Lammle taking leave so gracefully, and going down the stairs so lovingly and sweetly. Not quite so charming to see their smiling faces fall and brood as they dropped moodily into separate corners of their little carriage. But to be sure that was a sight behind the scenes, which nobody saw, and which nobody was meant to see.

Certain big, heavy vehicles, built on the model of the Podsnap plate, took away the heavy articles of guests weighing ever so much; and the less valuable articles got away after their various manners; and the Podsnap plate was put to bed. As Mr. Podsnap stood with his back to the drawing-room fire, pulling up his shirt-collar, like a veritable cock of the walk literally pluming himself in the midst of his possessions, nothing would have astonished him more than an intimation that Miss Podsnap, or any other young person properly born and bred, could not be exactly put away like the plate, brought out like the plate, polished like the plate, counted, weighed, and valued like the plate. That such a young person could possibly have a morbid vacancy in the heart for anything younger than the plate, or less monotonous than the plate; or that such a young person's thoughts could try to scale the region bounded on the north, south, east, and west, by the plate; was a monstrous imagination which he would on the spot have flourished

into space. This perhaps in some sort arose from Mr. Podsnap's blushing young person being, so to speak, all cheek: whereas there is a possibility that there may be young persons of a rather more complex organisation.

If Mr. Podsnap, pulling up his shirt-collar, could only have heard himself called "that fellow" in a certain short dialogue, which passed between Mr. and Mrs. Lammle in their opposite corners of their little carriage, rolling home!

"Sophronia, are you awake?"

"Am I likely to be asleep, sir?"

"Very likely, I should think, after that fellow's company. Attend to what I am going to say."

"I have attended to what you have already said, have I not? What else have I been doing all to-night?"

"Attend, I tell you" (in a raised voice), "to what I am going to say. Keep close to that idiot girl. Keep her under your thumb. You have her fast, and you are not to let her go. Do you hear?"

"I hear you."

"I foresee there is money to be made out of this, besides taking that fellow down a peg. We owe each other money, you know."

Mrs. Lammle winced a little at the reminder, but only enough to shake her scents and essences anew into the atmosphere of the little carriage, as she settled herself afresh in her own dark corner.

CHAPTER XII

THE SWEAT OF AN HONEST MAN'S BROW

Mr. Mortimer Lightwood and Mr. Eugene Wrayburn took a coffee-house dinner together in Mr. Lightwood's office. They had newly agreed to set up a joint establishment together. They had taken a bachelor cottage near Hampton, on the brink of the Thames, with a lawn, and a boat-house, and all things fitting, and were to float with the stream through the summer and the Long Vacation.

It was not summer yet, but spring; and it was not gentle spring ethereally mild, as in Thomson's Seasons, but nipping spring with an easterly wind, as in Johnson's, Jackson's, Dickson's, Smith's, and Jones's Seasons. The grating wind sawed rather than blew; and as it sawed, the sawdust whirled about the sawpit. Every street was a sawpit, and there were no top-sawyers; every passenger was an under-sawyer, with the sawdust blinding him and choking him.

That mysterious paper currency, which circulates in London when the wind blows, gyrated here and there and everywhere. Whence can it come, whither can it go? It hangs on every bush, flutters in every tree, is caught flying by the electric wires, haunts every inclosure, drinks at every pump, cowers at every grating, shudders upon every plot of grass, seeks rest in vain behind the legions of iron rails. In Paris, where nothing is wasted, costly and luxurious city though it be, but where wonderful human ants creep out of holes and pick up every scrap, there is no such thing. There, it blows nothing but dust. There, sharp eyes and sharp stomachs reap even the east wind, and get something out of it.

The wind sawed and the sawdust whirled. The shrubs wrung their many heads, bemoaning that they had been over-persuaded by the sun to bud; the young leaves pined; the sparrows repented of their early marriages, like men and women; the colours of the rainbow were discernible, not in floral spring,

but in the faces of the people whom it nibbled and pinched. And ever the wind sawed, and the sawdust whirled.

When the spring evenings are too long and light to shut out, and such weather is rife, the city which Mr. Podsnap so explanatorily called London, Londres, London, is at its worst. Such a black, shrill city, combining the qualities of a smoky house and a scolding wife; such a gritty city; such a hopeless city, with no rent in the leaden canopy of its sky; such a beleaguered city, invested by the great Marsh Forces of Essex and Kent. So the two old school-fellows felt it to be, as, their dinner done, they turned towards the fire to smoke. Young Blight was gone, the coffee-house waiter was gone, the plates and dishes were gone, the wine was going — but not in the same direction.

"The wind sounds up here," quoth Eugene, stirring the fire, "as if we were keeping a lighthouse. I wish we were."

"Don't you think it would bore us?" Lightwood asked.

"Not more than any other place. And there would be no Circuit to go. But that's a selfish consideration, personal to me."

"And no clients to come," added Lightwood. "Not that that's a selfish consideration at all personal to *me*."

"If we were on an isolated rock in a stormy sea," said Eugene, smoking, with his eyes on the fire, "Lady Tippins could n't put off to visit us, or, better still, might put off and get swamped. People could n't ask one to wedding breakfasts. There would be no Precedents to hammer at, except the plain-sailing Precedent of keeping the light up. It would be exciting to look out for wrecks."

"But otherwise," suggested Lightwood, "there might be a degree of sameness in the life."

"I have thought of that also," said Eugene, as if he really had been considering the subject in its various bearings with an eye to the business; "but it would be a defined and limited monotony. It would not extend beyond two people. Now, it's a question with me, Mortimer, whether a monotony, defined with that precision and limited to that extent, might not be more endurable than the unlimited monotony of one's fellow-creatures."

As Lightwood laughed and passed the wine, he remarked: "We shall have an opportunity, in our boating summer, of trying the question."

"An imperfect one," Eugene acquiesced, with a sigh, "but so we shall. I hope we may not prove too much for one another."

"Now, regarding your respected father," said Lightwood, bringing him to a subject they had expressly appointed to discuss: always the most slippery eel of eels of subjects to lay hold of.

"Yes, regarding my respected father," assented Eugene, settling himself in his arm-chair. "I would rather have approached my respected father by candle-light, as a theme requiring a little artificial brilliancy; but we will take him by twilight, enlivened with a glow of Wallsend."

He stirred the fire again as he spoke, and, having made it blaze, resumed.

"My respected father has found, down in the parental neighbourhood, a wife for his not-generally-respected son."

"With some money, of course?"

"With some money, of course, or he would not have found her. My respected father — let me shorten the dutiful tautology by substituting in future M. R. F., which sounds military, and rather like the Duke of Wellington."

"What an absurd fellow you are, Eugene!"

"Not at all, I assure you. M. R. F., having always in the clearest manner provided (as he calls it) for his children by prearranging from the hour of the birth of each, and sometimes from an earlier period, what the devoted little victim's calling and course in life should be, M. R. F. prearranged for myself that I was to be the barrister I am (with the slight addition of an enormous practice, which has not accrued), and also the married man I am not."

"The first you have often told me."

"The first I have often told you. Considering myself sufficiently incongruous on my legal eminence, I have until now suppressed my domestic destiny. You know M. R. F., but not as well as I do. If you knew him as well as I do, he would amuse you."

"Filially spoken, Eugene!"

"Perfectly so, believe me; and with every sentiment of affectionate deference towards M. R. F. But if he amuses me, I can't help it. When my eldest brother was born, of course the rest of us knew (I mean the rest of us would have known, if we

had been in existence) that he was heir to the Family Embarrassments — we call it before company the Family Estate. But when my second brother was going to be born by and by, 'this,' says M. R. F., 'is a little pillar of the church.' *Was* born, and became a pillar of the church; a very shaky one. My third brother appeared, considerably in advance of his engagement to my mother; but M. R. F., not at all put out by surprise, instantly declared him a Circumnavigator. Was pitchforked into the Navy, but has not circumnavigated. I announced myself, and was disposed of with the highly satisfactory results embodied before you. When my younger brother was half an hour old, it was settled by M. R. F. that he should have a mechanical genius. And so on. Therefore I say that M. R. F. amuses me."

"Touching the lady, Eugene."

"There M. R. F. ceases to be amusing, because my intentions are opposed to touching the lady."

"Do you know her?"

"Not in the least."

"Had n't you better see her?"

"My dear Mortimer, you have studied my character. Could I possibly go down there, labelled 'ELIGIBLE. ON VIEW,' and meet the lady, similarly labelled? Anything to carry out M. R. F.'s arrangements, I am sure, with the greatest pleasure — except matrimony. Could I possibly support it? I, so soon bored, so constantly, so fatally?"

"But you are not a consistent fellow, Eugene."

"In susceptibility to boredom," returned that worthy, "I assure you I am the most consistent of mankind."

"Why, it was but now that you were dwelling on the advantages of a monotony of two."

"In a lighthouse. Do me the justice to remember the condition. In a lighthouse."

Mortimer laughed again, and Eugene having laughed too for the first time, as if he found himself on reflection rather entertaining, relapsed into his usual gloom, and drowsily said, as he enjoyed his cigar, "No, there is no help for it; one of the prophetic deliveries of M. R. F. must for ever remain unfulfilled. With every disposition to oblige him, he must submit to a failure."

It had grown darker as they talked, and the wind was sawing

and the sawdust was whirling outside paler windows. The underlying churchyard was already settling into deep dim shade, and the shade was creeping up to the housetops among which they sat. "As if," said Eugene, — "as if the churchyard ghosts were rising."

He had walked to the window with his cigar in his mouth, to exalt its flavour by comparing the fireside with the outside, when he stopped midway on his return to his armchair, and said: —

"Apparently one of the ghosts has lost its way, and dropped in to be directed. Look at this phantom!"

Lightwood, whose back was towards the door, turned his head, and there, in the darkness of the entry, stood a something in the likeness of a man; to whom he addressed the not irrelevant inquiry, "Who the devil are you?"

"I ask your pardons, Governors," replied the ghost, in a hoarse double-barrelled whisper, "but might either on you be Lawyer Lightwood?"

"What do you mean by not knocking at the door?" demanded Mortimer.

"I ask your pardons, Governors," replied the ghost, as before, "but probable you was not aware your door stood open."

"What do you want?"

Hereunto the ghost again hoarsely replied in its double-barrelled manner, "I ask your pardons, Governors, but might one on you be Lawyer Lightwood?"

"One of us is," said the owner of that name.

"All right, Governors Both," returned the ghost, carefully closing the room door; "'tickler business."

Mortimer lighted the candles. They showed the visitor to be an ill-looking visitor with a squinting leer, who, as he spoke, fumbled at an old sodden fur cap, formless and mangy, that looked like a furry animal, dog or cat, puppy or kitten, drowned and decaying.

"Now," said Mortimer, "what is it?"

"Governors Both," returned the man, in what he meant to be a wheedling tone, "which on you might be Lawyer Lightwood?"

"I am."

"Lawyer Lightwood," ducking at him with a servile air, "I am a man as gets my living, and as seeks to get my living, by the sweat of my brow. Not to risk being done out of the sweat

of my brow, by any chances, I should wish afore going further to be swore in."

"I am not a swearer in of people, man."

The visitor, clearly anything but reliant on this assurance, doggedly muttered, "Alfred David."

"Is that your name?" asked Lightwood.

"My name?" returned the man. "No; I want to take a Alfred David."

(Which Eugene, smoking and contemplating him, interpreted as meaning Affidavit.)

"I tell you, my good fellow," said Lightwood, with his indolent laugh, "that I have nothing to do with swearing."

"He can swear *at* you," Eugene explained; "and so can I. But we can't do more for you."

Much discomfited by this information, the visitor turned the drowned dog or cat, puppy or kitten, about and about, and looked from one of the Governors Both to the other of the Governors Both, while he deeply considered within himself. At length he decided: —

"Then I must be took down."

"Where?" asked Lightwood.

"Here," said the man. "In pen and ink."

"First, let us know what your business is about."

"It's about," said the man, taking a step forward, dropping his hoarse voice, and shading it with his hand, "it's about from five to ten thousand pound reward. That's what it's about. It's about Murder. That's what it's about."

"Come nearer the table. Sit down. Will you have a glass of wine?"

"Yes, I will," said the man; "and I don't deceive you, Governors."

It was given him. Making a stiff arm to the elbow, he poured the wine into his mouth, tilted it into his right cheek, as saying, "What do you think of it?" tilted it into his left cheek, as saying, "What do *you* think of it?" jerked it into his stomach, as saying, "What do *you* think of it?" To conclude, smacked his lips, as if all three replied, "We think well of it."

"Will you have another?"

"Yes, I will," he repeated, "and I don't deceive you, Governors." And also repeated the other proceedings.

"Now," began Lightwood, "what 's your name?"

"Why, there you 're rather fast, Lawyer Lightwood," he replied, in a remonstrant manner. "Don't you see, Lawyer Lightwood? There you 're a little bit fast. I 'm going to earn from five to ten thousand pound by the sweat of my brow; and as a poor man doing justice to the sweat of my brow, is it likely I can afford to part with so much as my name without its being took down?"

Deferring to the man's sense of the binding powers of pen and ink and paper, Lightwood nodded acceptance of Eugene's nodded proposal to take those spells in hand. Eugene, bringing them to the table, sat down as clerk or notary.

"Now," said Lightwood, "what 's your name?"

But further precaution was still due to the sweat of this honest fellow's brow.

"I should wish, Lawyer Lightwood," he stipulated, "to have that T' other Governor as my witness that what I said I said. Consequent, will the T' other Governor be so good as chuck me his name and where he lives?"

Eugene, cigar in mouth and pen in hand, tossed him his card. After spelling it out slowly, the man made it into a little roll, and tied it up in an end of his neckerchief still more slowly.

"Now," said Lightwood, for the third time, "if you have quite completed your various preparations, my friend, and have fully ascertained that your spirits are cool and not in any way hurried, what 's your name?"

"Roger Riderhood."

"Dwelling-place?"

"Lime'us Hole."

"Calling or occupation?"

Not quite so glib with this answer as with the previous two, Mr. Riderhood gave in the definition, "Water-side character."

"Anything against you?" Eugene quietly put in, as he wrote.

Rather baulked, Mr. Riderhood evasively remarked, with an innocent air, that he believed the T' other Governor had asked him summat.

"Ever in trouble?" said Eugene.

"Once." (Might happen to any man, Mr. Riderhood added incidentally.)

"On suspicion of —?"

"Of seaman's pocket," said Mr. Riderhood. "Whereby I was in reality the man's best friend, and tried to take care of him."

"With the sweat of your brow?" asked Eugene.

"Till it poured down like rain," said Roger Riderhood.

Eugene leaned back in his chair, and smoked, with his eyes negligently turned on the informer, and his pen ready to reduce him to more writing. Lightwood also smoked, with his eyes negligently turned on the informer.

"Now let me be took down again," said Riderhood, when he had turned the drowned cap over and under, and had brushed it the wrong way (if it had a right way) with his sleeve. "I give information that the man that done the Harmon Murder is Gaffer Hexam, the man that found the body. The hand of Jesse Hexam, commonly called Gaffer on the river and alongshore, is the hand that done that deed. His hand and no other."

The two friends glanced at one another with more serious faces than they had shown yet.

"Tell us on what grounds you make this accusation," said Mortimer Lightwood.

"On the grounds," answered Riderhood, wiping his face with his sleeve, "that I was Gaffer's pardner, and suspected of him many a long day and many a dark night. On the grounds that I knowed his ways. On the grounds that I broke the pardnership because I see the danger; which I warn you his daughter may tell you another story about that, for anythink I can say, but you know what it 'll be worth, for she 'd tell you lies, the world round and the heavens broad, to save her father. On the grounds that it 's well understood along the cause'ays and the stairs that he done it. On the grounds that he 's fell off from, because he done it. On the grounds that I will swear he done it. On the grounds that you may take me where you will, and get me sworn to it. *I* don't want to back out of the consequences. I have made up *my* mind. Take me anywheres."

"All this is nothing," said Lightwood.

"Nothing?" repeated Riderhood, indignantly and amazedly.

"Merely nothing. It goes to no more than that you suspect this man of the crime. You may do so with some reason, or you may do so with no reason, but he cannot be convicted on your suspicion."

"Have n't I said — I appeal to the T' other Governor as my witness — have n't I said from the first minute that I opened my mouth in this here world-without-end-everlasting chair" (he evidently used that form of words as next in force to an affidavit), "that I was willing to swear that he done it? Have n't I said, Take me and get me sworn to it? Don't I say so now? You won't deny it, Lawyer Lightwood?"

"Surely not; but you only offer to swear to your suspicion, and I tell you it is not enough to swear to your suspicion."

"Not enough, ain't it, Lawyer Lightwood?" he cautiously demanded.

"Positively not."

"And did I say it *was* enough? Now, I appeal to the T' other Governor. Now, fair! Did I say so?"

"He certainly has not said that he had no more to tell," Eugene observed in a low voice without looking at him, "whatever he seemed to imply."

"Hah!" cried the informer, triumphantly perceiving that the remark was generally in his favour, though apparently not closely understanding it. "Fort'nate for me I had a witness!"

"Go on, then," said Lightwood. "Say out what you have to say. No after-thought."

"Let me be took down then!" cried the informer, eagerly and anxiously. "Let me be took down, for by George and the Draggin I 'm a coming to it now! Don't do nothing to keep back from a honest man the fruits of the sweat of his brow! I give information, then, that he told me that he done it. Is *that* enough?"

"Take care what you say, my friend," returned Mortimer.

"Lawyer Lightwood, take care, you, what I say; for I judge you 'll be answerable for follering it up!" Then slowly and emphatically beating it all out with his open right hand on the palm of his left; "I, Roger Riderhood, Lime'us Hole, Water-side character, tell you, Lawyer Lightwood, that the man Jesse Hexam, commonly called upon the river and along-shore Gaffer, told me that he done the deed. What 's more, he told me with his own lips that he done the deed. What 's more, he said that he done the deed. And I 'll swear it!"

"Where did he tell you so?"

"Outside," replied Riderhood, always beating it out, with

his head determinedly set askew, and his eyes watchfully dividing their attention between his two auditors, — "outside the door of the Six Jolly Fellowships, towards a quarter arter twelve o'clock at midnight, — but I will not in my conscience undertake to swear to so fine a matter as five minutes, — on the night when he picked up the body. The Six Jolly Fellowships stands on the spot still. The Six Jolly Fellowships won't run away. If it turns out that he warn't at the Six Jolly Fellowships that night at midnight, I 'm a liar."

"What did he say?"

"I 'll tell you (take me down, T 'other Governor, I ask no better). He come out first; I come out last. I might be a minute arter him; I might be half a minute, I might be a quarter of a minute; I cannot swear to that and therefore I won't. That 's knowing the obligations of a Alfred David, ain't it?"

"Go on."

"I found him a waiting to speak to me. He says to me, 'Rogue Riderhood' — for that 's the name I 'm mostly called by — not for any meaning in it, for meaning it has none, but because of its being similar to Roger."

"Never mind that."

"'Scuse *me*, Lawyer Lightwood, it 's a part of the truth, and as such I do mind it, and I must mind it and I will mind it. 'Rogue Riderhood,' he says, 'words passed betwixt us on the river to-night.' Which they had; ask his daughter! 'I threatened you,' he says, 'to chop you over the fingers with my boat's stretcher, or take a aim at your brains with my boat-hook. I did so on accounts of your looking too hard at what I had in tow, as if you was suspicious, and on accounts of your holding on to the gunwale of my boat.' I says to him, 'Gaffer, I know it.' He says to me, 'Rogue Riderhood, you are a man in a dozen' — I think he said in a score, but of that I am not positive, so take the lowest figure, for precious be the obligations of a Alfred David. 'And,' he says, 'when your fellow-men is up, be it their lives or be it their watches, sharp is ever the word with you. Had you suspicions?' I says, 'Gaffer, I had; and what 's more I have.' He falls a shaking, and he says, 'Of what?' I says, 'Of foul play.' He falls a shaking worse, and he says, 'There *was* foul play then. I done it for his money. Don't betray me!' Those were the words as ever he used."

There was a silence broken only by the fall of the ashes in the grate. An opportunity which the informer improved by smearing himself all over the head and neck and face with his drowned cap, and not at all improving his own appearance.

"What more?" asked Lightwood.

"Of him, d' ye mean, Lawyer Lightwood?"

"Of anything to the purpose."

"Now, I 'm blest if I understand you, Governors Both," said the informer, in a creeping manner, propitiating both, though only one had spoken. "What? Ain't *that* enough?"

"Did you ask him how he did it, where he did it, when he did it?"

"Far be it from me, Lawyer Lightwood! I was so troubled in my mind, that I would n't have knowed more, no, not for the sum as I expect to earn from you by the sweat of my brow, twice told! I had put an end to the pardnership. I had cut the connection. I could n't undo what was done; and when he begs and prays, 'Old pardner, on my knees, don't split upon me!' I only makes answer, 'Never speak another word to Roger Riderhood, nor look him in the face!' and I shuns that man."

Having given these words a swing to make them mount the higher and go the further, Rogue Riderhood poured himself out another glass of wine unbidden, and seemed to chew it, as, with the half-emptied glass in his hand, he stared at the candles.

Mortimer glanced at Eugene, but Eugene sat glowering at his paper, and would give him no responsive glance. Mortimer again turned to the informer, to whom he said: —

"You have been troubled in your mind a long time, man?"

Giving his wine a final chew, and swallowing it, the informer answered in a single word: —

"Hages!"

"When all that stir was made, when the Government reward was offered, when the police were on the alert, when the whole country rang with the crime!" said Mortimer impatiently.

"Hah!" Mr. Riderhood very slowly and hoarsely chimed in, with several retrospective nods of his head. "Warn't I troubled in my mind then!"

"When conjecture ran wild, when the most extravagant suspicions were afloat, when half a dozen innocent people

might have been laid by the heels any hour in the day!" said Mortimer, almost warming.

"Hah!" Mr. Riderhood chimed in, as before. "Warn't I troubled in my mind through it all!"

"But he had n't," said Eugene, drawing a lady's head upon his writing-paper, and touching it at intervals, "the opportunity then of earning so much money, you see."

"The T' other Governor hits the nail, Lawyer Lightwood! It was that as turned me. I had many times and again struggled to relieve myself of the trouble on my mind, but I could n't get it off. I had once very nigh got it off to Miss Abbey Potterson which keeps the Six Jolly Fellowships — there is the 'ouse, it won't run away, — there lives the lady, she ain't likely to be struck dead afore you get there — ask her! — but I could n't do it. At last, out comes the new bill with your own lawful name, Lawyer Lightwood, printed to it, and then *I* asks the question of my own intellects, Am I to have this trouble on my mind for ever? Am I never to throw it off? Am I always to think more of Gaffer than of my own self? If he 's got a daughter, ain't *I* got a daughter?"

"And echo answered" — Eugene suggested.

"You have," said Mr. Riderhood, in a firm tone.

"Incidentally mentioning, at the same time, her age?" inquired Eugene.

"Yes, Governor. Two-and-twenty last October. And then I put it to myself, 'Regarding the money. It is a pot of money.' For it *is* a pot," said Mr. Riderhood, with candour, "and why deny it?"

"Hear!" from Eugene, as he touched his drawing.

"'It is a pot of money; but is it a sin for a labouring man that moistens every crust of bread he earns with his tears — or if not with them, with the colds he catches in his head — is it a sin for that man to earn it? Say there is anything again earning it.' This I put to myself strong, as in duty bound: 'How can it be said without blaming Lawyer Lightwood for offering it to be earned?' And was it for *me* to blame Lawyer Lightwood? No?"

"No," said Eugene.

"Certainly not, Governor," Mr. Riderhood acquiesced. "So I made up my mind to get my trouble off my mind, and to earn by the sweat of my brow what was held out to me. And

what's more," he added, suddenly turning bloodthirsty, "I mean to have it! And now I tell you, once and away, Lawyer Lightwood, that Jesse Hexam, commonly called Gaffer, his hand, and no other, done the deed, on his own confession to me. And I give him up to you, and I want him took. This night!"

After another silence, broken only by the fall of the ashes in the grate, which attracted the informer's attention as if it were the chinking of money, Mortimer Lightwood leaned over his friend, and said in a whisper: —

"I suppose I must go with this fellow to our imperturbable friend at the police station."

"I suppose," said Eugene, "there is no help for it."

"Do you believe him?"

"I believe him to be a thorough rascal. But he may tell the truth for his own purpose, and for this occasion only."

"It does n't look like it."

"*He* does n't," said Eugene. "But neither is his late partner, whom he denounces, a prepossessing person. The firm are cut-throat Shepherds both, in appearance. I should like to ask him one thing."

The subject of this conference sat leering at the ashes, trying with all his might to overhear what was said, but feigning abstraction as the "Governors Both" glanced at him.

"You mentioned (twice, I think) a daughter of this Hexam's," said Eugene, aloud. "You don't mean to imply that she had any guilty knowledge of the crime?"

The honest man, after considering — perhaps considering how his answer might affect the fruits of the sweat of his brow — replied, unreservedly, "No, I don't."

"And you implicate no other person?"

"It ain't what I implicate, it's what Gaffer implicated," was the dogged and determined answer. "I don't pretend to know more than that his words to me was, 'I done it.' Those was his words."

"I must see this out, Mortimer," whispered Eugene, rising. "How shall we go?"

"Let us walk," whispered Lightwood, and give this fellow time to think of it."

Having exchanged the question and answer, they prepared themselves for going out, and Mr. Riderhood rose. While ex-

tinguishing the candles, Lightwood, quite as a matter of course, took up the glass from which that honest gentleman had drunk, and coolly tossed it under the grate, where it fell shivering into fragments.

"Now, if you will take the lead," said Lightwood, "Mr. Wrayburn and I will follow. You know where to go, I suppose?"

"I suppose I do, Lawyer Lightwood."

"Take the lead, then."

The water-side character pulled his drowned cap over his ears with both hands, and making himself more round-shouldered than nature had made him, by the sullen and persistent slouch with which he went, went down the stairs, round by the Temple Church, across the Temple into Whitefriars, and so on by the water-side streets.

"Look at his hang-dog air," said Lightwood, following.

"It strikes me rather as a hang-*man* air," returned Eugene. "He has undeniable intentions that way."

They said little else as they followed. He went on before them as an ugly Fate might have done, and they kept him in view, and would have been glad enough to lose sight of him. But on he went before them, always at the same distance, and the same rate. Aslant against the hard implacable weather and the rough wind, he was no more to be driven back than hurried forward, but held on like an advancing Destiny. There came, when they were about midway on their journey, a heavy rush of hail, which in a few minutes pelted the streets clear, and whitened them. It made no difference to him. A man's life being to be taken and the price of it got, the hailstones to arrest the purpose must lie larger and deeper than those. He crushed through them, leaving marks in the fast-melting slush that were mere shapeless holes; one might have fancied, following, that the very fashion of humanity had departed from his feet.

The blast went by, and the moon contended with the fast-flying clouds, and the wild disorder reigning up there made the pitiful little tumults in the streets of no account. It was not that the wind swept all the brawlers into places of shelter, as it had swept the hail still lingering in heaps wherever there was refuge for it; but that it seemed as if the streets were absorbed by the sky, and the night were all in the air.

"If he has had time to think of it," said Eugene, "he has not had time to think better of it — or differently of it, if that's better. There is no sign of drawing back in him; and as I recollect this place, we must be close upon the corner where we alighted that night."

In fact, a few abrupt turns brought them to the river-side, where they had slipped about among the stones, and where they now slipped more; the wind coming against them in slants and flaws, across the tide and the winding of the river, in a furious way. With that habit of getting under the lee of any shelter which water-side characters acquire, the water-side character at present in question led the way to the leeside of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters before he spoke.

"Look round here, Lawyer Lightwood, at them red curtains. It's the Fellowships, the 'ouse as I told you would n't run away. And has it run away?"

Not showing himself much impressed by this remarkable confirmation of the informer's evidence, Lightwood inquired what other business they had there?

"I wished you to see the Fellowships for yourself, Lawyer Lightwood, that you might judge whether I'm a liar; and now I'll see Gaffer's window for myself, that we may know whether he's at home."

With that he crept away.

"He'll come back, I suppose?" murmured Lightwood.

"Ay! and go through with it," murmured Eugene.

He came back after a very short interval indeed.

"Gaffer's out, and his boat's out. His daughter's at home, sitting a looking at the fire. But there's some supper getting ready, so Gaffer's expected. I can find what move he's upon, easy enough, presently."

Then he beckoned and led the way again, and they came to the police station, still as clean and cool and steady as before, saving that the flame of its lamp — being but a lamp-flame, and only attached to the Force as an outsider — flickered in the wind.

Also, within doors, Mr. Inspector was at his studies as of yore. He recognised the friends the instant they reappeared, but their reappearance had no effect on his composure. Not even the circumstance that Riderhood was their conductor moved him, otherwise than that as he took a dip of ink he

seemed, by a settlement of his chin in his stock, to propound to that personage, without looking at him, the question, "What have *you* been up to, last?"

Mortimer Lightwood asked him, would n't he be so good as look at those notes? Handing him Eugene's.

Having read the first few lines, Mr. Inspector mounted to that (for him) extraordinary pitch of emotion that he said, "Does either of you two gentlemen happen to have a pinch of snuff about him?" Finding that neither had, he did quite as well without it, and read on.

"Have you heard these read?" he then demanded of the honest man.

"No," said Riderhood.

"Then you had better hear them." And so read them aloud, in an official manner.

"Are these notes correct, now, as to the information you bring here and the evidence you mean to give?" he asked, when he had finished reading.

"They are. They are as correct," returned Mr. Riderhood, "as I am. I can't say more than that for 'em."

"I 'll take this man myself, sir," said Mr. Inspector to Lightwood. Then to Riderhood, "Is he at home? Where is he? What 's he doing? You have made it your business to know all about him, no doubt."

Riderhood said what he did know, and promised to find out in a few minutes what he did n't know.

"Stop," said Mr. Inspector; "not till I tell you. We must n't look like business. Would you two gentlemen object to making a pretence of taking a glass of something in my company at the Fellowships? Well-conducted house, and highly respectable landlady."

They replied that they would be happy to substitute a reality for the pretence, which, in the main, appeared to be as one with Mr. Inspector's meaning.

"Very good," said he, taking his hat from its peg, and putting a pair of handcuffs in his pocket as if they were his gloves. "Reserve!" Reserve saluted. "You know where to find me?" Reserve again saluted. "Riderhood, when you have found out concerning his coming home, come round to the window of Cosy, tap twice at it, and wait for me. Now, gentlemen."

As the three went out together, and Riderhood slouched off from under the trembling lamp his separate way, Lightwood asked the officer what he thought of this?

Mr. Inspector replied, with due generality and reticence, that it was always more likely that a man had done a bad thing than that he had n't. That he himself had several times "reckoned up" Gaffer, but had never been able to bring him to a satisfactory criminal total. That if this story was true, it was only in part true. That the two men, very shy characters, would have been jointly and pretty equally "in it;" but that this man had "spotted" the other, to save himself and get the money.

"And I think," added Mr. Inspector, in conclusion, "that if all goes well with him, he 's in a tolerable way of getting it. But as this is the Fellowships, gentlemen, where the lights are, I recommend dropping the subject. You can't do better than be interested in some lime works anywhere down about Northfleet, and doubtful whether some of your lime don't get into bad company as it comes up in barges."

"You hear, Eugene?" said Lightwood over his shoulder. "You are deeply interested in lime."

"Without lime," returned that unmoved barrister-at-law, "my existence would be unilluminated by a ray of hope."

CHAPTER XIII

TRACKING THE BIRD OF PREY

THE two lime merchants, with their escort, entered the dominions of Miss Abbey Potterson, to whom their escort (presenting them and their pretended business over the half door of the bar, in a confidential way) preferred his figurative request that "a mouthful of fire" might be lighted in Cosy. Always well disposed to assist the constituted authorities, Miss Abbey bade Bob Gliddery attend the gentlemen to that retreat, and promptly enliven it with fire and gaslight. Of this commission the bare-armed Bob, leading the way with a flaming wisp of paper, so speedily acquitted himself, that Cosy seemed to leap out of a dark sleep and embrace them warmly, the moment they passed the lintels of its hospitable door.

"They burn sherry very well here," said Mr. Inspector, as a piece of local intelligence. "Perhaps you gentlemen might like a bottle?"

The answer being By all means, Bob Gliddery received his instructions from Mr. Inspector, and departed in a becoming state of alacrity engendered by reverence for the majesty of the law.

"It's a certain fact," said Mr. Inspector, "that this man we have received our information from," indicating Riderhood with his thumb over his shoulder, "has for some time past given the other man a bad name arising out of your lime barges, and that the other man has been avoided in consequence. I don't say what it means or proves, but it's a certain fact. I had it first from one of the opposite sex of my acquaintance," vaguely indicating Miss Abbey with his thumb over his shoulder, "down away at a distance, over yonder."

Then probably Mr. Inspector was not quite unprepared for their visit that evening? Lightwood hinted.

"Well, you see," said Mr. Inspector, "it was a question of making a move. It's of no use moving if you don't know

what your move is. You had better by far keep still. In the matter of this lime, I certainly had an idea that it might lie betwixt the two men; I always had that idea. Still, I was forced to wait for a start, and I was n't so lucky as to get a start. This man that we have received our information from has got a start, and if he don't meet with a check he may make the running and come in first. There may turn out to be something considerable for him that comes in second, and I don't mention who may or who may not try for that place. There 's duty to do, and I shall do it, under any circumstances, to the best of my judgment and ability."

"Speaking as a shipper of lime" — began Eugene.

"Which no man has a better right to do than yourself, you know," said Mr. Inspector.

"I hope not," said Eugene; "my father having been a shipper of lime before me, and my grandfather before him, — in fact, we having been a family immersed to the crowns of our heads in lime during several generations, — I beg to observe that if this missing lime could be got hold of without any young female relative of any distinguished gentleman engaged in the lime trade (which I cherish next to my life) being present, I think it might be a more agreeable proceeding to the assisting bystanders, that is to say, lime-burners."

"I also," said Lightwood, pushing his friend aside with a laugh, "should much prefer that."

"It shall be done, gentlemen, if it can be done conveniently," said Mr. Inspector, with coolness. "There is no wish on my part to cause any distress in that quarter. Indeed, I am sorry for that quarter."

"There was a boy in that quarter," remarked Eugene. "He is still there?"

"No," said Mr. Inspector. "He has quitted those works. He is otherwise disposed of."

"Will she be left alone then?" asked Eugene.

"She will be left," said Mr. Inspector, "alone."

Bob's reappearance with a steaming jug broke off the conversation. But although the jug steamed forth a delicious perfume, its contents had not received that last happy touch which the surpassing finish of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters imparted on such momentous occasions. Bob carried in his left hand one of those iron models of sugar-loaf hats, before men-

tioned, into which he emptied the jug, and the pointed end of which he thrust deep down into the fire, so leaving it for a few moments while he disappeared and reappeared with three bright drinking-glasses. Placing these on the table and bending over the fire, meritoriously sensible of the trying nature of his duty, he watched the wreaths of steam, until at the special instant of projection he caught up the iron vessel and gave it one delicate twirl, causing it to send forth one gentle hiss. Then he restored the contents to the jug; held over the steam of the jug each of the three bright glasses in succession; finally filled them all, and with a clear conscience awaited the applause of his fellow-creatures.

It was bestowed (Mr. Inspector having proposed as an appropriate sentiment "The lime trade!"), and Bob withdrew to report the commendations of the guests to Miss Abbey in the bar. It may be here in confidence admitted that, the room being close shut in his absence, there had not appeared to be the slightest reason for the elaborate maintenance of this same lime fiction. Only it had been regarded by Mr. Inspector as so uncommonly satisfactory, and so fraught with mysterious virtues, that neither of his clients had presumed to question it.

Two taps were now heard on the outside of the window. Mr. Inspector, hastily fortifying himself with another glass, strolled out with a noiseless foot and an unoccupied countenance. As one might go to survey the weather and the general aspect of the heavenly bodies.

"This is becoming grim, Mortimer," said Eugene, in a low voice. "I don't like this."

"Nor I," said Lightwood. "Shall we go?"

"Being here, let us stay. You ought to see it out, and I won't leave you. Besides, that lonely girl with the dark hair runs in my head. It was little more than a glimpse we had of her that last time, and yet I almost see her waiting by the fire to-night. Do you feel like a dark combination of traitor and pickpocket when you think of that girl?"

"Rather," returned Lightwood. "Do you?"

"Very much so."

Their escort strolled back again, and reported. Divested of its various lime-lights and shadows, his report went to the effect that Gaffer was away in his boat, supposed to be on his old look-out; that he had been expected last high-water; that

having missed it for some reason or other, he was not, according to his usual habits at night, to be counted on before next high-water, or it might be an hour or so later; that his daughter, surveyed through the window, would seem to be so expecting him, for the supper was not cooking, but set out ready to be cooked; that it would be high-water at about one, and that it was now barely ten; that there was nothing to be done but watch and wait; that the informer was keeping watch at the instant of that present reporting, but that two heads were better than one (especially when the second was Mr. Inspector's); and that the reporter meant to share the watch. And forasmuch as crouching under the lee of a hauled-up boat on a night when it blew cold and strong, and when the weather was varied with blasts of hail at times, might be wearisome to amateurs, the reporter closed with the recommendation that the two gentlemen should remain, for a while at any rate, in their present quarters, which were weather-tight and warm.

They were not inclined to dispute this recommendation, but they wanted to know where they could join the watchers when so disposed. Rather than trust to a verbal description of the place, which might mislead, Eugene (with a less weighty sense of personal trouble on him than he usually had) would go out with Mr. Inspector, note the spot, and come back.

On the shelving bank of the river, among the slimy stones of a causeway — not the special causeway of the Six Jolly Fellowships, which had a landing-place of its own, but another, a little removed, and very near to the old windmill which was the denounced man's dwelling-place — were a few boats; some moored and already beginning to float; others, hauled up above the reach of the tide. Under one of these latter, Eugene's companion disappeared. And when Eugene had observed its position with reference to the other boats, and had made sure that he could not miss it, he turned his eyes upon the building where, as he had been told, the lonely girl with the dark hair sat by the fire.

He could see the light of the fire shining through the window. Perhaps it drew him on to look in. Perhaps he had come out with the express intention. That part of the bank having rank grass growing on it, there was no difficulty in getting close, without any noise of footsteps; it was but to scramble up a ragged face of pretty hard mud some three or four feet high and come

upon the grass and to the window. He came to the window by that means.

She had no other light than the light of the fire. The unkindled lamp stood on the table. She sat on the ground, looking at the brasier, with her face leaning on her hand. There was a kind of film or flicker on her face, which at first he took to be the fitful firelight; but on a second look, he saw that she was weeping. A sad and solitary spectacle, as shown him by the rising and the falling of the fire.

It was a little window of but four pieces of glass, and was not curtained; he chose it because the larger window near it was.. It showed him the room, and the bills upon the wall, respecting the drowned people, starting out and receding by turns. But he glanced slightly at them, though he looked long and steadily at her. A deep rich piece of colour, with the brown flush of her cheek and the shining lustre of her hair, though sad and solitary, weeping by the rising and the falling of the fire.

She started up. He had been so very still, that he felt sure it was not he who had disturbed her, so merely withdrew from the window and stood near it in the shadow of the wall. She opened the door, and said in an alarmed tone, "Father, was that you calling me?" And again, "Father!" And once again, after listening, "Father! I thought I heard you call me twice before!"

No response. As she re-entered at the door, he dropped over the bank and made his way back, among the ooze and near the hiding-place, to Mortimer Lightwood: to whom he told what he had seen of the girl, and how this was becoming very grim indeed.

"If the real man feels as guilty as I do," said Eugene, "he is remarkably uncomfortable."

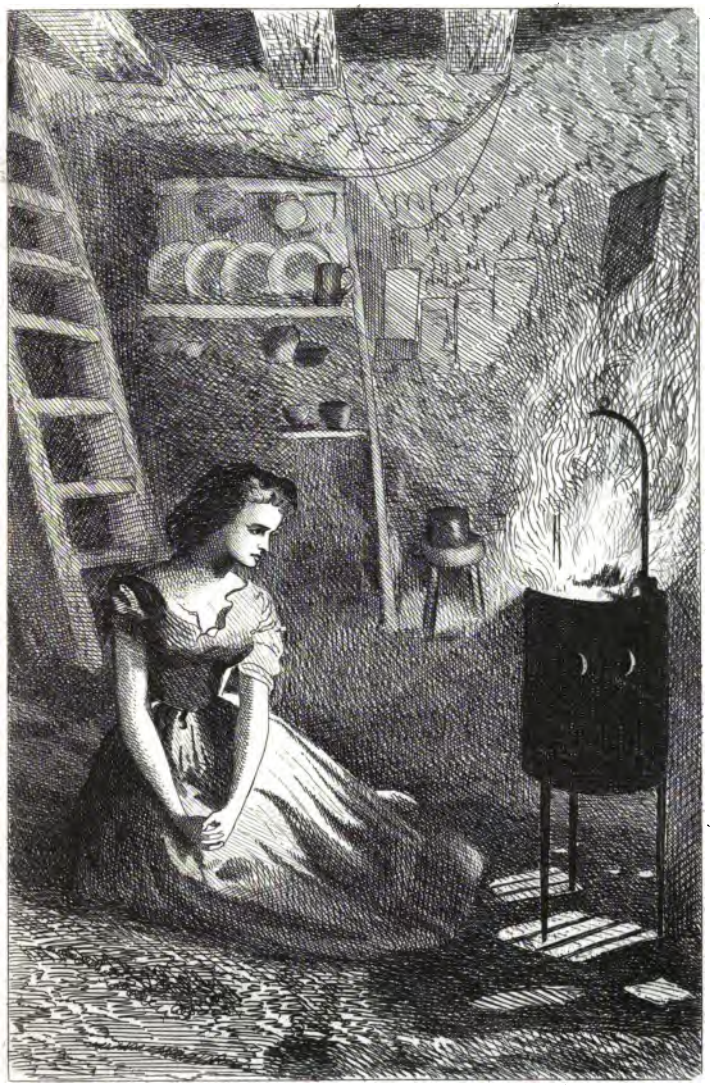
"Influence of secrecy," suggested Lightwood.

"I am not at all obliged to it for making me Guy Fawkes in the vault and a Sneak in the area both at once," said Eugene. "Give me some more of that stuff."

Lightwood helped him to some more of that stuff, but it had been cooling, and did n't answer now.

"Pooh," said Eugene, spitting it out among the ashes. "Tastes like the wash of the river."

"Are you so familiar with the flavour of the wash of the river?"



"I seem to be to-night. I feel as if I had been half drowned, and swallowing a gallon of it."

"Influence of locality," suggested Lightwood.

"You are mighty learned to-night, you and your influences," returned Eugene. "How long shall we stay here?"

"How long do you think?"

"If I could choose, I should say a minute," replied Eugene, "for the Jolly Fellowship-Porters are not the jolliest dogs I have known. But I suppose we are best here until they turn us out with the other suspicious characters, at midnight."

Thereupon he stirred the fire, and sat down on one side of it. It struck eleven, and he made believe to compose himself patiently. But gradually he took the fidgets in one leg, and then in the other leg, and then in one arm, and then in the other arm, and then in his chin, and then in his back, and then in his forehead, and then in his hair, and then in his nose; and then he stretched himself recumbent on two chairs, and groaned; and then he started up.

"Invisible insects of diabolical activity swarm in this place. I am tickled and twitched all over. Mentally, I have now committed a burglary under the meanest circumstances, and the myrmidons of justice are at my heels."

"I am quite as bad," said Lightwood, sitting up facing him, with a tumbled head, after going through some wonderful evolutions, in which his head had been the lowest part of him. "This restlessness began with me long ago. All the time you were out I felt like Gulliver with the Lilliputians firing upon him."

"It won't do, Mortimer. We must get into the air; we must join our dear friend and brother, Riderhood. And let us tranquillise ourselves by making a compact. Next time (with a view to our peace of mind) we'll commit the crime, instead of taking the criminal. You swear it?"

"Certainly."

"Sworn! Let Tippins look to it. Her life's in danger."

Mortimer rang the bell to pay the score, and Bob appeared to transact that business with him: whom Eugene, in his careless extravagance, asked if he would like a situation in the lime-trade?

"Thankee, sir, no, sir," said Bob: "I've a good sitiwation here, sir."

"If you change your mind at any time," returned Eugene, "come to me at my works, and you 'll always find an opening in the lime-kiln."

"Thankee, sir," said Bob.

"This is my partner," said Eugene, "who keeps the books and attends to the wages. A fair day's wages for a fair day's work is ever my partner's motto."

"And a very good un it is, gentlemen," said Bob, receiving his fee, and drawing a bow out of his head with his right hand, very much as he would have drawn a pint of beer out of the beer engine.

"Eugene," Mortimer apostrophised him, laughing quite heartily when they were alone again, "how *can* you be so ridiculous?"

"I am in a ridiculous humour," quoth Eugene; "I am a ridiculous fellow. Everything is ridiculous. Come along!"

It passed into Mortimer Lightwood's mind that a change of some sort, best expressed perhaps as an intensification of all that was wildest and most negligent and reckless in his friend, had come upon him in the last half hour or so. Thoroughly used to him as he was, he found something new and strained in him that was for the moment perplexing. This passed into his mind, and passed out again; but he remembered it afterwards.

"There 's where she sits, you see," said Eugene, when they were standing under the bank, roared and riven at by the wind. "There 's the light of her fire."

"I 'll take a peep through the window," said Mortimer.

"No, don't!" Eugene caught him by the arm. "Best not make a show of her. Come to our honest friend."

He led him to the post of watch, and they both dropped down and crept under the lee of the boat; a better shelter than it had seemed before, being directly contrasted with the blowing wind and the bare night.

"Mr. Inspector at home?" whispered Eugene.

"Here I am, sir."

"And our friend of the perspiring brow is at the far corner there? Good. Anything happened?"

"His daughter has been out, thinking she heard him calling, unless it was a sign to him to keep out of the way. It might have been."

"It might have been Rule Britannia," muttered Eugene, "but it was n't. Mortimer!"

"Here!" (on the other side of Mr. Inspector.)

"Two burglaries now and a forgery!"

With this indication of his depressed state of mind, Eugene fell silent.

They were all silent for a long while. As it got to be flood-tide, and the water came nearer to them, noises on the river became more frequent, and they listened more. To the turning of steam paddles, to the clinking of iron chain, to the creaking of blocks, to the measured working of oars, to the occasional violent barking of some passing dog on shipboard, who seemed to scent them lying in their hiding-place. The night was not so dark but that, besides the lights at bows and mastheads gliding to and fro, they could discern some shadowy bulk attached; and now and then a ghostly lighter with a large dark sail, like a warning arm, would start up very near them, pass on, and vanish. At this time of their watch, the water close to them would be often agitated by some impulsion given it from a distance. Often they believed this beat and plash to be the boat they lay in wait for, running in ashore; and again and again they would have started up, but for the immobility with which the informer, well used to the river, kept quiet in his place.

The wind carried away the striking of the great multitude of city church clocks, for those lay to leeward of them; but there were bells to windward that told them of its being One — Two — Three. Without that aid they would have known how the night wore, by the falling of the tide, recorded in the appearance of an ever-widening black wet strip of shore, and the emergence of the paved causeway from the river, foot by foot.

As the time so passed, this slinking business became a more and more precarious one. It would seem as if the man had had some intimation of what was in hand against him, or had taken fright? His movements might have been planned to gain for him, in getting beyond their reach, twelve hours' advantage? The honest man who had expended the sweat of his brow became uneasy, and began to complain with bitterness of the proneness of mankind to cheat him — him invested with the dignity of Labour!

Their retreat was so chosen that while they could watch the river, they could watch the house. No one had passed in or out, since the daughter thought she heard the father calling. No one could pass in or out without being seen.

"But it will be light at five," said Mr. Inspector, "and then *we* shall be seen."

"Look here," said Riderhood, "what do you say to this? He may have been lurking in and out, and just holding his own betwixt two or three bridges, for hours back."

"What do you make of that?" said Mr. Inspector. Stoical, but contradictory.

"He may be doing so at this present time."

"What do you make of *that?*" said Mr. Inspector.

"My boat 's among them boats here at the cause'ay."

"And what do you make of your boat?" said Mr. Inspector.

"What if I put off in her and take a look round? I know his ways, and the likely nooks he favours. I know where he 'd be at such a time of the tide, and where he 'd be at such another time. Ain't I been his pardner? None of you need show. None of you need stir. I can shove her off without help; and as to me being seen, I 'm about at all times."

"You might have given a worse opinion," said Mr. Inspector, after brief consideration. "Try it."

"Stop a bit. Let 's work it out. If I want you, I 'll drop round under the Fellowships and tip you a whistle."

"If I might so far presume as to offer a suggestion to my honourable and gallant friend, whose knowledge of naval matters far be it from me to impeach," Eugene struck in with great deliberation, "it would be, that to tip a whistle is to advertise mystery and invite speculation. My honourable and gallant friend will, I trust, excuse me, as an independent member, for throwing out a remark which I feel to be due to this house and the country."

"Was that the T' other Governor, or Lawyer Lightwood?" asked Riderhood. For they spoke as they crouched or lay, without seeing one another's faces.

"In reply to the question put by my honourable and gallant friend," said Eugene, who was lying on his back with his hat on his face, as an attitude highly expressive of watchfulness, "I can have no hesitation in replying (it not being inconsistent with the public service) that those accents were the accents of the T' other Governor."

"You 've tolerable good eyes, ain't you, Governor? You 've all tolerable good eyes, ain't you?" demanded the informer.

All.

"Then if I row up under the Fellowships and lay there, no need to whistle. You'll make out that there's a speck of something or another there, and you'll know it's me, and you'll come down that cause'ay to me. Understood all?"

Understood all.

"Off she goes then!"

In a moment, with the wind cutting keenly at him sideways, he was staggering down to his boat; in a few moments he was clear, and creeping up the river under their own shore.

Eugene had raised himself on his elbow to look into the darkness after him. "I wish the boat of my honourable and gallant friend," he murmured, lying down again and speaking into his hat, "may be endowed with philanthropy enough to turn bottom upward and extinguish him! — Mortimer."

"My honourable friend."

"Three burglaries, two forgeries, and a midnight assassination."

Yet, in spite of having those weights on his conscience, Eugene was somewhat enlivened by the late slight change in the circumstances of affairs. So were his two companions. Its being a change was everything. The suspense seemed to have taken a new lease, and to have begun afresh from a recent date. There was something additional to look for. They were all three more sharply on the alert, and less deadened by the miserable influences of the place and time.

More than an hour had passed, and they were even dozing, when one of the three — each said it was he, and he had *not* dozed — made out Riderhood in his boat at the spot agreed on. They sprang up, came out from their shelter, and went down to him. When he saw them coming he dropped alongside the causeway; so that they, standing on the causeway, could speak with him in whispers, under the shadowy mass of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters fast asleep.

"Blest if I can make it out!" said he, staring at them.

"Make what out? Have you seen him?"

"No."

"What *have* you seen?" asked Lightwood. For he was staring at them in the strangest way.

"I've seen his boat."

"Not empty?"

"Yes, empty. And what 's more, — adrift. And what 's more, — with one scull gone. And what 's more, — with t' other scull jammed in the thowels and broke short off. And what 's more — the boat 's drove tight by the tide, 'atwixt two tiers of barges. And what 's more, — he 's in luck again, by George if he ain't!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE BIRD OF PREY BROUGHT DOWN

COLD on the shore, in the raw cold of that leaden crisis in the four-and-twenty hours when the vital force of all the noblest and prettiest things that live is at its lowest, the three watchers looked each at the blank faces of the other two, and all at the blank face of Riderhood in his boat.

"Gaffer's boat, Gaffer in luck again, and yet no Gaffer!" So spake Riderhood, staring disconsolate.

As if with one accord, they all turned their eyes towards the light of the fire shining through the window. It was fainter and duller. Perhaps fire, like the higher animal and vegetable life it helps to sustain, has its greatest tendency towards death, when the night is dying, and the day is not yet born.

"If it was me that had the law of this here job in hand," growled Riderhood, with a threatening shake of his head, "blest if I would n't lay hold of *her*, at any rate!"

"Ay, but it is not you," said Eugene, with something so suddenly fierce in him that the informer returned submissively:

"Well, well, well, T' other Governor, I did n't say it was. A man may speak."

"And vermin may be silent," said Eugene. "Hold your tongue, you water-rat!"

Astonished by his friend's unusual heat, Lightwood stared too, and then said: "What can have become of this man?"

"Can't imagine. Unless he dived overboard." The informer wiped his brow ruefully as he said it, sitting in his boat and always staring disconsolate.

"Did you make his boat fast?"

"She 's fast enough till the tide runs back. I could n't make her faster than she is. Come aboard of mine, and see for your ownselves."

There was a little backwardness in complying, for the freight looked too much for the boat; but on Riderhood's protesting

"that he had had half a dozen, dead and alive, in her afore now, and she was nothing deep in the water nor down in the stern even then, to speak of," they carefully took their places, and trimmed the crazy thing. While they were doing so, Riderhood still sat staring disconsolate.

"All right. Give way!" said Lightwood.

"Give way, by George!" repeated Riderhood, before shoving off. "If he 's gone and made off any how, Lawyer Lightwood, it 's enough to make me give way in a different manner. But he always was a cheat, con-found him! He always was a infernal cheat, was Gaffer. Nothing straightfor'ard, nothing on the square. So mean, so underhanded. Never going through with a thing, nor carrying it out like a man!"

"Hallo! Steady!" cried Eugene (he had recovered immediately on embarking), as they bumped heavily against a pile; and then in a lower voice reversed his late apostrophe by remarking ("I wish the boat of my honourable and gallant friend may be endowed with philanthropy enough *not* to turn bottom-upward and extinguish us!) Steady, steady! Sit close, Mortimer. Here 's the hail again. See how it flies, like a troop of wild cats, at Mr. Riderhood's eyes!"

Indeed he had the full benefit of it, and it so mauled him, though he bent his head low and tried to present nothing but the mangy cap to it, that he dropped under the lee of a tier of shipping, and they lay there until it was over. The squall had come up, like a spiteful messenger before the morning; there followed in its wake a ragged tier of light which ripped the dark clouds until they showed a great grey hole of day.

They were all shivering, and everything about them seemed to be shivering; the river itself, craft, rigging, sails, such early smoke as there yet was on the shore. Black with wet, and altered to the eye by white patches of hail and sleet, the huddled buildings looked lower than usual, as if they were cowering, and had shrunk with the cold. Very little life was to be seen on either bank, windows and doors were shut, and the staring black and white letters upon wharves and warehouses "looked," said Eugene to Mortimer, "like inscriptions over the graves of dead businesses."

As they glided slowly on, keeping under the shore and sneaking in and out among the shipping by back-alleys of water, in a pilfering way that seemed to be their boatman's normal manner

of progression, all the objects among which they crept were so huge in contrast with their wretched boat, as to threaten to crush it. Not a ship's hull, with its rusty iron-links of cable run out of hawse-holes long discoloured with the iron's rusty tears, but seemed to be there with a fell intention. Not a figure-head but had the menacing look of bursting forward to run them down. Not a sluice-gate, or a painted scale upon a post or wall, showing the depth of water, but seemed to hint, like the dreadfully facetious Wolf in bed in Grandmamma's cottage, "That's to drown *you* in, my dears!" Not a lumbering black barge, with its cracked and blistered side impending over them, but seemed to suck at the river with a thirst for sucking them under. And everything so vaunted the spoiling influences of water — discoloured copper, rotten wood, honey-combed stone, green dank deposit — that the after-consequences of being crushed, sucked under, and drawn down, looked as ugly to the imagination as the main event.

Some half-hour of this work, and Riderhood unshipped his sculls, stood holding on to a barge, and hand over hand longwise along the barge's side gradually worked his boat under her head into a secret little nook of scummy water. And driven into that nook, and wedged as he had described, was Gaffer's boat; that boat with the stain still in it, bearing some resemblance to a muffled human form.

"Now tell me I'm a liar!" said the honest man.

("With a morbid expectation," murmured Eugene to Lightwood, "that somebody is always going to tell him the truth.")

"This is Hexam's boat," said Mr. Inspector. "I know her well."

"Look at the broken scull. Look at the t' other scull gone. *Now* tell me I am a liar!" said the honest man.

Mr. Inspector stepped into the boat. Eugene and Mortimer looked on.

"And see now!" added Riderhood, creeping aft, and showing a stretched rope made fast there and towing overboard. "Did n't I tell you he was in luck again?"

"Haul in," said Mr. Inspector.

"Easy to say haul in," answered Riderhood. "Not so easy done. His luck 's got fouled under the keels of the barges. I tried to haul in last time, but I could n't. See how taut the line is!"

"I must have it up," said Mr. Inspector. "I am going to take this boat ashore, and his luck along with it. Try easy now."

He tried easy now; but the luck resisted; would n't come.

"I mean to have it, and the boat too," said Mr. Inspector, playing the line.

But still the luck resisted; would n't come.

"Take care," said Riderhood. "You 'll disfigure. Or pull asunder perhaps."

"I am not going to do either, not even to your Grandmother," said Mr. Inspector; "but I mean to have it. Come!" he added, at once persuasively and with authority to the hidden object in the water, as he played the line again; "it 's no good this sort of game, you know. You *must* come up. I mean to have you."

There was so much virtue in this distinctly and decidedly meaning to have it, that it yielded a little, even while the line was played.

"I told you so," quoth Mr. Inspector, pulling off his outer coat, and leaning well over the stern with a will. "Come!"

It was an awful sort of fishing, but it no more disconcerted Mr. Inspector than if he had been fishing in a punt on a summer evening by some soothing weir high up the peaceful river. After certain minutes, and a few directions to the rest to "ease her a little for'ard," and "now ease her a trifle aft," and the like, he said composedly, "All clear!" and the line and the boat came free together.

Accepting Lightwood's proffered hand to help him up, he then put on his coat, and said to Riderhood, "Hand me over those spare sculls of yours, and I 'll pull this in to the nearest stairs. Go ahead you, and keep out in pretty open water, that I may n't get fouled again."

His directions were obeyed, and they pulled ashore directly; two in one boat, two in the other.

"Now," said Mr. Inspector, again to Riderhood, when they were all on the slushy stones, "you have had more practice in this than I have had, and ought to be a better workman at it. Undo the tow-rope, and we 'll help you haul in."

Riderhood got into the boat accordingly. It appeared as if he had scarcely had a moment's time to touch the rope or look over the stern, when he came scrambling back, as pale as the morning, and gasped out: —

"By the Lord, he 's done me!"

"What do you mean?" they all demanded.

He pointed behind him at the boat, and gasped to that degree that he dropped upon the stones to get his breath.

"Gaffer's done me. It 's Gaffer!"

They ran to the rope, leaving him gasping there. Soon, the form of the bird of prey, dead some hours, lay stretched upon the shore, with a new blast storming at it and clotting the wet hair with hailstones.

Father, was that you calling me? Father! I thought I heard you call me twice before! Words never to be answered, those, upon the earth-side of the grave. The wind sweeps jeeringly over Father, whips him with the frayed ends of his dress and his jagged hair, tries to turn him where he lies stark on his back, and force his face towards the rising sun, that he may be shamed the more. A lull, and the wind is secret and prying with him; lifts and lets fall a rag; hides palpitating under another rag; runs nimbly through his hair and beard. Then, in a rush, it cruelly taunts him. Father, was that you calling me? Was it you, the voiceless and the dead? Was it you, thus buffeted as you lie here in a heap? Was it you, thus baptised unto Death, with these flying impurities now flung upon your face? Why not speak, Father? Soaking into this filthy ground as you lie here is your own shape. Did you never see such a shape soaked into your boat? Speak, Father. Speak to us, the winds, the only listeners left you!

"Now see," said Mr. Inspector, after mature deliberation, kneeling on one knee beside the body, when they had stood looking down on the drowned man, as he had many a time looked down on many another man, — "the way of it was this. Of course you gentlemen hardly failed to observe that he was towing by the neck and arms."

They had helped to release the rope, and of course not.

"And you will have observed before, and you will observe now, that this knot, which was drawn chock-tight round his neck by the strain of his own arms, is a slip-knot," holding it up for demonstration.

Plain enough.

"Likewise you will have observed how he had run the other end of this rope to his boat."

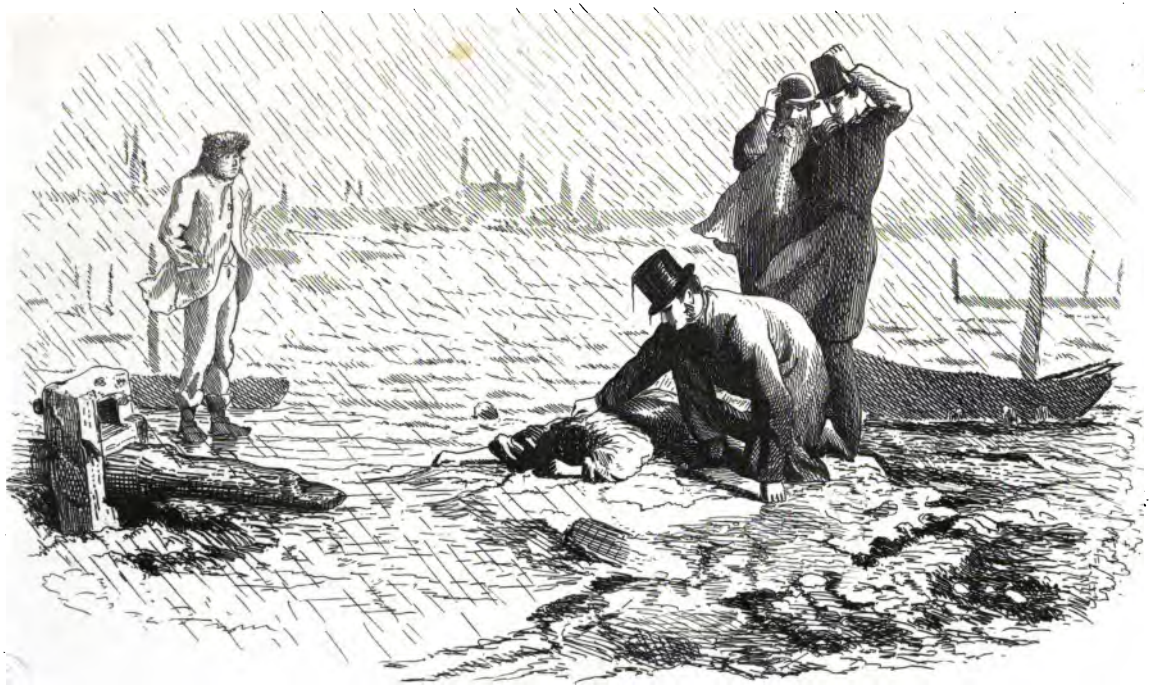
It had the curves and indentations in it still, where it had been twined and bound.

"Now see," said Mr. Inspector, "see how it works round upon him. It's a wild tempestuous evening when this man that was," stooping to wipe some hailstones out of his hair with an end of his own drowned jacket, — "there! Now he's more like himself, though he's badly bruised — when this man that was, rows out upon the river on his usual lay. He carries with him this coil of rope. He always carries with him this coil of rope. It's as well known to me as he was himself. Sometimes it lay in the bottom of his boat. Sometimes he hung it loose round his neck. He was a light dresser was this man; — you see?" lifting the loose neckerchief over his breast, and taking the opportunity of wiping the dead lips with it — "and when it was wet, or freezing, or blew cold, he would hang this coil of line round his neck. Last evening he does this. Worse for him! He dodges about in his boat, does this man, till he gets chilled. His hands," taking up one of them, which dropped like a leaden weight, "get numbed. He sees some object that's in his way of business, floating. He makes ready to secure that object. He unwinds the end of his coil that he wants to take some turns on in his boat, and he takes turns enough on it to secure that it shan't run out. He makes it too secure, as it happens. He is a little longer about this than usual, his hands being numbed. His object drifts up before he is quite ready for it. He catches at it, thinks he'll make sure of the contents of the pockets anyhow, in case he should be parted from it, bends right over the stern, and in one of these heavy squalls, or in the cross-swell of two steamers, or in not being quite prepared, or through all or most or some, gets a lurch, overbalances, and goes head-foremost overboard. Now see! He can swim, can this man, and instantly he strikes out. But in such striking-out he tangles his arms, pulls strong on the slip-knot, and it runs home. The object he had expected to take in tow floats by, and his own boat tows him dead, to where we found him, all entangled in his own line. You'll ask me how I make out about the pockets? First, I'll tell you more; there was silver in 'em. How do I make that out? Simple and satisfactory. Because he's got it here." The lecturer held up the tightly clenched right hand.

"What is to be done with the remains?" asked Lightwood.

"If you would n't object to standing by him half a minute,

The End of Pr[illegible] brought down



sir," was the reply, "I'll find the nearest of our men to come and take charge of him; — I still call it *him*, you see," said Mr. Inspector, looking back as he went, with a philosophical smile upon the force of habit.

"Eugene," said Lightwood — and was about to add "we may wait at a little distance," when turning his head he found that no Eugene was there. He raised his voice and called, "Eugene! Holloa!" But no Eugene replied.

It was broad daylight now, and he looked about. But no Eugene was in all the view.

Mr. Inspector speedily returning down the wooden stairs, with a police constable, Lightwood asked him if he had seen his friend leave them? Mr. Inspector could not exactly say that he had seen him go, but he had noticed that he was restless.

"Singular and entertaining combination, sir, your friend."

"I wish it had not been a part of his singular and entertaining combination to give me the slip under these dreary circumstances at this time of the morning," said Lightwood. "Can we get anything hot to drink?"

We could, and we did. In a public-house kitchen with a large fire. We got hot brandy and water, and it revived us wonderfully. Mr. Inspector having to Mr. Riderhood announced his official intention of "keeping his eye upon him," stood him in a corner of the fireplace, like a wet umbrella, and took no further outward and visible notice of that honest man, except ordering a separate service of brandy and water for him; apparently out of the public funds.

As Mortimer Lightwood sat before the blazing fire, conscious of drinking brandy and water then and there in his sleep, and yet at one and the same time drinking burnt sherry at the Six Jolly Fellowships, and lying under the boat on the river shore, and sitting in the boat that Riderhood rowed, and listening to the lecture recently concluded, and having to dine in the Temple with an unknown man, who described himself as M. R. F. Eugene Gaffer Harmon, and said he lived at Hailstorm, — as he passed through these curious vicissitudes of fatigue and slumber, arranged upon the scale of a dozen hours to the second, he became aware of answering aloud a communication of pressing importance that had never been made to him, and then turned it into a cough on beholding Mr. Inspector. For, he felt,

with some natural indignation, that that functionary might otherwise suspect him of having closed his eyes, or wandered in his attention.

"Here just before us, you see," said Mr. Inspector.

"*I* see," said Lightwood, with dignity.

"And had hot brandy and water too, you see," said Mr. Inspector, "and then cut off at a great rate."

"Who?" said Lightwood.

"Your friend, you know."

"*I* know," he replied, again with dignity.

After hearing, in a mist through which Mr. Inspector loomed vague and large, that the officer took upon himself to prepare the dead man's daughter for what had befallen in the night, and generally that he took everything upon himself, Mortimer Lightwood stumbled in his sleep to a cab-stand, called a cab, and had entered the army and committed a capital military offence and been tried by court-martial and found guilty and had arranged his affairs and been marched out to be shot, before the door banged.

Hard work rowing the cab through the City to the Temple, for a cup of from five to ten thousand pounds value, given by Mr. Boffin; and hard work holding forth at that immeasurable length to Eugene (when he had been rescued with a rope from the running pavement) for making off in that extraordinary manner! But he offered such ample apologies, and was so very penitent, that when Lightwood got out of the cab he gave the driver a particular charge to be careful of him. Which the driver (knowing there was no other fare left inside) stared at prodigiously.

In short, the night's work had so exhausted and worn out this actor in it, that he had become a mere somnambulist. He was too tired to rest in his sleep until he was even tired out of being too tired, and dropped into oblivion. Late in the afternoon he awoke, and in some anxiety sent round to Eugene's lodging hard by, to inquire if he were up yet?

Oh, yes, he was up. In fact, he had not been to bed. He had just come home. And here he was, close following on the heels of the message.

"Why, what bloodshot, draggled, dishevelled spectacle is this!" cried Mortimer.

"Are my feathers so very much rumpled?" said Eugene,

coolly going up to the looking-glass. "They *are* rather out of sorts. But consider. Such a night for plumage!"

"Such a night?" repeated Mortimer. "What became of you in the morning?"

"My dear fellow," said Eugene, sitting on his bed, "I felt that we had bored one another so long that an unbroken continuance of those relations must inevitably terminate in our flying to opposite points of the earth. I also felt that I had committed every crime in the Newgate Calendar. So, for mingled considerations of friendship and felony, I took a walk."

CHAPTER XV

TWO NEW SERVANTS

Mr. and Mrs. Boffin sat after breakfast, in the Bower, a prey to prosperity. Mr. Boffin's face denoted Care and Complication. Many disordered papers were before him, and he looked at them about as hopefully as an innocent civilian might look at a crowd of troops whom he was required at five minutes' notice to manœuvre and review. He had been engaged in some attempts to make notes of these papers; but being troubled (as men of his stamp often are) with an exceedingly distrustful and corrective thumb, that busy member had so often interposed to smear his notes, that they were little more legible than the various impressions of itself, which blurred his nose and forehead. It is curious to consider, in such a case as Mr. Boffin's, what a cheap article ink is, and how far it may be made to go. As a grain of musk will scent a drawer for many years, and still lose nothing appreciable of its original weight, so a halfpenny-worth of ink would blot Mr. Boffin to the roots of his hair and the calves of his legs, without inscribing a line on the paper before him, or appearing to diminish in the inkstand.

Mr. Boffin was in such severe literary difficulties that his eyes were prominent and fixed, and his breathing was stertorous, when, to the great relief of Mrs. Boffin, who observed these symptoms with alarm, the yard bell rang.

"Who's that, I wonder!" said Mrs. Boffin.

Mr. Boffin drew a long breath, laid down his pen, looked at his notes as doubting whether he had the pleasure of their acquaintance, and appeared, on a second perusal of their countenances, to be confirmed in his impression that he had not, when there was announced by the hammer-headed young man: —

"Mr. Rokesmith."

"Oh!" said Mr. Boffin. "Oh, indeed! Our and the Wilfers' Mutual Friend, my dear. Yes. Ask him to come in."

Mr. Rokesmith appeared.

"Sit down, sir," said Mr. Boffin, shaking hands with him. "Mrs. Boffin you 're already acquainted with. Well, sir, I am rather unprepared to see you, for, to tell you the truth, I 've been so busy with one thing and another, that I've not had time to turn your offer over."

"That 's apology for both of us: for Mr. Boffin, and for me as well," said the smiling Mrs. Boffin. "But Lor'! we can talk it over now; can't us?"

Mr. Rokesmith bowed, thanked her, and said he hoped so.

"Let me see then," resumed Mr. Boffin, with his hand to his chin. "It was Secretary that you named; was n't it?"

"I said Secretary," assented Mr. Rokesmith.

"It rather puzzled me at the time," said Mr. Boffin, "and it rather puzzled me and Mrs. Boffin when we spoke of it afterwards, because (not to make a mystery of our belief) we have always believed a Secretary to be a piece of furniture, mostly of mahogany, lined with green baize or leather, with a lot of little drawers in it. Now, you won't think I take a liberty when I mention that you certainly ain't *that*."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Rokesmith. But he had used the word in the sense of Steward.

"Why, as to Steward, you see," returned Mr. Boffin, with his hand still to his chin, "the odds are that Mrs. Boffin and me may never go upon the water. Being both bad sailors, we should want a Steward if we did; but there 's generally one provided."

Mr. Rokesmith again explained; defining the duties he sought to undertake, as those of general superintendent, or manager, or over-looker, or man of business.

"Now, for instance — come!" said Mr. Boffin, in his pouncing way. "If you entered my employment, what would you do?"

"I would keep exact accounts of all the expenditure you sanctioned, Mr. Boffin. I would write your letters, under your directions. I would transact your business with people in your pay or employment. I would," with a glance and a half smile at the table, "arrange your papers —"

Mr. Boffin rubbed his inky ear, and looked at his wife.

"— And so arrange them as to have them always in order for immediate reference, with a note of the contents of each outside it."

"I tell you what," said Mr. Boffin, slowly crumpling his own blotted note in his hand; "if you 'll turn to at these present papers, and see what you can make of 'em, I shall know better what I can make of you."

No sooner said than done. Relinquishing his hat and gloves, Mr. Rokesmith sat down quietly at the table, arranged the open papers into an orderly heap, cast his eyes over each in succession, folded it, docketed it on the outside, laid it in a second heap, and, when that second heap was complete and the first gone, took from his pocket a piece of string and tied it together with a remarkably dexterous hand at a running curve and a loop.

"Good!" said Mr. Boffin. "Very good! now let us hear what they 're all about; will you be so good?"

John Rokesmith read his abstracts aloud. They were all about the new house. Decorator's estimate, so much. Furniture estimate, so much. Estimate for furniture of offices, so much. Coachmaker's estimate, so much. Horse-dealer's estimate, so much. Harness-maker's estimate, so much. Goldsmith's estimate, so much. Total, so very much. Then came correspondence. Acceptance of Mr. Boffin's offer of such a date, and to such an effect. Rejection of Mr. Boffin's proposal of such a date and to such an effect. Concerning Mr. Boffin's scheme of such another date to such another effect. All compact and methodical.

"Apple-pie order!" said Mr. Boffin, after checking off each inscription with his hand, like a man beating time. "And whatever you do with your ink, *I* can't think, for you 're as clean as a whistle after it. Now, as to a letter. Let 's," said Mr. Boffin, rubbing his hands in his pleasantly childish admiration, "let 's try a letter next."

"To whom shall it be addressed, Mr. Boffin?"

"Any one. Yourself."

Mr. Rokesmith quickly wrote, and then read aloud: —

"'Mr. Boffin presents his compliments to Mr. John Rokesmith, and begs to say that he has decided on giving Mr. John Rokesmith a trial in the capacity he desires to fill. Mr. Boffin takes Mr. John Rokesmith at his word, in postponing to some indefinite period the consideration of salary. It is quite understood that Mr. Boffin is in no way committed on that point. Mr. Boffin has merely to add, that he relies on Mr. John Rokesmith's assurance that he will be faithful and serviceable.

Mr. John Rokesmith will please enter on his duties immediately.'"

"Well! Now, Noddy!" cried Mrs. Boffin, clapping her hands. "That *is* a good one!"

Mr. Boffin was no less delighted; indeed, in his own bosom, he regarded both the composition itself and the device that had given birth to it, as a very remarkable monument of human ingenuity.

"And I tell you, my deary," said Mrs. Boffin, "that if you don't close with Mr. Rokesmith now at once, and if you ever go a muddling yourself again with things never meant nor made for you, you 'll have an apoplexy — besides iron-moulding your linen — and you 'll break my heart."

Mr. Boffin embraced his spouse for these words of wisdom, and then, congratulating John Rokesmith on the brilliancy of his achievements, gave him his hand in pledge of their new relations. So did Mrs. Boffin.

"Now," said Mr. Boffin, who, in his frankness, felt that it did not become him to have a gentleman in his employment five minutes without reposing some confidence in him, "you must be let a little more into our affairs, Rokesmith. I mentioned to you, when I made your acquaintance, or I might better say when you made mine, that Mrs. Boffin's inclinations was setting in the way of Fashion, but that I did n't know how fashionable we might or might not grow. Well! Mrs. Boffin has carried the day, and we 're going in neck and crop for Fashion."

"I rather inferred that, sir," replied John Rokesmith, "from the scale on which your new establishment is to be maintained."

"Yes," said Mr. Boffin, "it 's to be a Spanker. The fact is, my literary man named to me that a house with which he is, as I may say, connected — in which he has an interest — "

"As property?" inquired John Rokesmith.

"Why no," said Mr. Boffin, "not exactly that; a sort of a family tie."

"Association?" the Secretary suggested.

"Ah!" said Mr. Boffin. "Perhaps. Anyhow, he named to me that the house had a board up, 'This Eminently Aristocratic Mansion to be let or sold.' Me and Mrs. Boffin went to look at it, and finding it beyond a doubt Eminently Aristocratic (though a trifle high and dull, which after all may be part of

the same thing) took it. My literary man was so friendly as to drop into a charming piece of poetry on that occasion, in which he complimented Mrs. Boffin on coming into possession of — how did it go, my dear?"

Mrs. Boffin replied: —

"'The gay, the gay and festive scene,
The halls, the halls of dazzling light.'"

"That's it! And it was made neater by there really being two halls in the house, a front 'un and a back 'un, besides the servants'. He likewise dropped into a very pretty piece of poetry to be sure, respecting the extent to which he would be willing to put himself out of the way to bring Mrs. Boffin round, in case she should ever get low in her spirits in the house. Mrs. Boffin has a wonderful memory. Will you repeat it, my dear?"

Mrs. Boffin complied, by reciting the verses in which this obliging offer had been made, exactly as she had received them.

"'I'll tell thee how the maiden wept, Mrs. Boffin,
When her true love was slain, ma'am,
And how her broken spirit slept, Mrs. Boffin,
And never woke again, ma'am,
I'll tell thee (if agreeable to Mr. Boffin) how the steed drew nigh,
And left his lord afar;
And if my tale (which I hope Mr. Boffin might excuse) should make you sigh,
I'll strike the light guitar.'"

"Correct to the letter!" said Mr. Boffin. "And I consider that the poetry brings us both in, in a beautiful manner."

The effect of the poem on the Secretary being evidently to astonish him, Mr. Boffin was confirmed in his high opinion of it, and was greatly pleased.

"Now you see, Rokesmith," he went on, "a literary man — *with* a wooden leg — is liable to jealousy. I shall therefore cast about for comfortable ways and means of not calling up Wegg's jealousy, but of keeping you in your department, and keeping him in his."

"Lor'!" cried Mrs. Boffin. "What I say is, the world's wide enough for all of us."

"So it is, my dear," said Mr. Boffin, "when not literary. But when so, not so. And I am bound to bear in mind that I took Wegg on at a time when I had no thought of being fash-

ionable or of leaving the Bower. To let him feel himself anywise slighted now, would be to be guilty of a meanness, and to act like having one's head turned by the halls of dazzling light. Which Lord forbid! Rokesmith, what shall we say about your living in the house?"

"In this house?"

"No, no. I have got other plans for this house. In the new house?"

"That will be as you please, Mr. Boffin. I hold myself quite at your disposal. You know where I live at present."

"Well!" said Mr. Boffin, after considering the point; "suppose you keep as you are for the present, and we 'll decide by and by. You 'll begin to take charge at once of all that 's going on in the new house, will you?"

"Most willingly. I will begin this very day. Will you give me the address?"

Mr. Boffin repeated it, and the Secretary wrote it down in his pocket-book. Mrs. Boffin took the opportunity of his being so engaged, to get a better observation of his face than she had yet taken. It impressed her in his favour, for she nodded aside to Mr. Boffin, "I like him."

"I will see directly that everything is in train, Mr. Boffin."

"Thankee. Being here, would you care at all to look round the Bower?"

"I should greatly like it. I have heard so much of its story."

"Come!" said Mr. Boffin. And he and Mrs. Boffin led the way.

A gloomy house the Bower, with sordid signs on it of having been, through its long existence as Harmony Jail, in miserly holding. Bare of paint, bare of paper on the walls, bare of furniture, bare of experience of human life. Whatever is built by man for man's occupation, must, like natural creations, fulfil the intention of its existence, or soon perish. This old house had wasted more from desuetude than it would have wasted from use, twenty years for one.

A certain leanness falls upon houses not sufficiently imbued with life (as if they were nourished upon it), which was very noticeable here. The staircase, balustrades, and rails, had a spare look — an air of being denuded to the bone — which the panels of the walls and the jambs of the doors and windows also

bore. The scanty movables partook of it; save for the cleanliness of the place, the dust into which they were all resolving would have lain thick on the floors; and those, both in colour and in grain, were worn like old faces that had kept much alone.

The bedroom, where the clutching old man had lost his grip on life, was left as he had left it. There was the old grisly four-post bedstead, without hangings, and with a jail-like upper rim of iron and spikes; and there was the old patchwork counterpane. There was the tight-clenched old bureau, receding atop like a bad and secret forehead; there was the cumbersome old table with twisted legs at the bedside; and there was the box upon it, in which the will had lain. A few old chairs with patchwork covers, under which the more precious stuff to be preserved had slowly lost its quality of colour without imparting pleasure to any eye, stood against the wall. A hard family likeness was on all these things.

"The room was kept like this, Rokesmith," said Mr. Boffin, "against the son's return. In short, everything in the house was kept exactly as it came to us, for him to see and approve. Even now, nothing is changed but our own room below stairs that you have just left. When the son came home for the last time in his life, and for the last time in his life saw his father, it was most likely in this room that they met."

As the Secretary looked all round it, his eyes rested on a side door in a corner.

"Another staircase," said Mr. Boffin, unlocking the door, "leading down into the yard. We 'll go down this way, as you may like to see the yard, and it 's all in the road. When the son was a little child, it was up and down these stairs that he mostly came and went to his father. He was very timid of his father. I 've seen him sit on these stairs, in his shy way, poor child, many a time. Me and Mrs. Boffin have comforted him, sitting with his little book on these stairs, often."

"Ah! And his poor sister too," said Mrs. Boffin. "And here 's the sunny place on the white wall where they one day measured one another. Their own little hands wrote up their names here, only with a pencil; but the names are here still, and the poor dears gone for ever."

"We must take care of the names, old lady," said Mr. Boffin. "We must take care of the names. They shan't be rubbed out in our time, nor yet, if we can help it, in the time after us. Poor little children!"

"Ah, poor little children!" said Mrs. Boffin.

They had opened the door at the bottom of the staircase giving on the yard, and they stood in the sunlight, looking at the scrawl of the two unsteady childish hands two or three steps up the staircase. There was something in this simple memento of a blighted childhood, and in the tenderness of Mrs. Boffin, that touched the Secretary.

Mr. Boffin then showed his new man of business the Mounds, and his own particular Mound which had been left him as his legacy under the will before he acquired the whole estate.

"It would have been enough for us," said Mr. Boffin, "in case it had pleased God to spare the last of those two young lives and sorrowful deaths. We did n't want the rest."

At the treasures of the yard, and at the outside of the house, and at the detached building which Mr. Boffin pointed out as the residence of himself and his wife during the many years of their service, the Secretary looked with interest. It was not until Mr. Boffin had shown him every wonder of the Bower twice over, that he remembered his having duties to discharge elsewhere.

"You have no instructions to give me, Mr. Boffin, in reference to this place?"

"Not any, Rokesmith. No."

"Might I ask, without seeming impertinent, whether you have any intention of selling it?"

"Certainly not. In remembrance of our old master, our old master's children, and our old service, me and Mrs. Boffin mean to keep it up as it stands."

The Secretary's eyes glanced with so much meaning in them at the Mounds, that Mr. Boffin said, as if in answer to a remark: —

"Ay, ay, that 's another thing. I may sell *them*, though I should be sorry to see the neighbourhood deprived of 'em too. It 'll look but a poor, dead flat without the Mounds. Still I don't say that I 'm going to keep 'em always there, for the sake of the beauty of the landscape. There 's no hurry about it; that 's all I say at present. I ain't a scholar in much, Rokesmith, but I 'm a pretty fair scholar in dust. I can price the Mounds to a fraction, and I know how they can be best disposed of, and likewise that they take no harm by standing where they do. You 'll look in to-morrow, will you be so kind?"

"Every day. And the sooner I can get you into your new house, complete, the better you will be pleased, sir?"

"Well, it ain't that I'm in a mortal hurry," said Mr. Boffin; "only when you *do* pay people for looking alive, it's as well to know that they *are* looking alive. Ain't that your opinion?"

"Quite!" replied the Secretary; and so withdrew.

"Now," said Mr. Boffin to himself, subsiding into his regular series of turns in the yard, "if I can make it comfortable with Wegg, my affairs will be going smooth."

The man of low cunning had, of course, acquired a mastery over the man of high simplicity. The mean man had, of course, got the better of the generous man. How long such conquests last, is another matter; that they are achieved, is every-day experience, not even to be flourished away by Podsnappery itself. The undesigning Boffin had become so far immeshed by the wily Wegg that his mind misgave him he was a very designing man indeed in purposing to do more for Wegg. It seemed to him (so skilful was Wegg) that he was plotting darkly, when he was contriving to do the very thing that Wegg was plotting to get him to do. And thus, while he was mentally turning the kindest of kind faces on Wegg this morning, he was not absolutely sure but that he might somehow deserve the charge of turning his back on him.

For these reasons Mr. Boffin passed but anxious hours until evening came, and with it Mr. Wegg, stumping leisurely to the Roman Empire. At about this period Mr. Boffin had become profoundly interested in the fortunes of a great military leader known to him as Bully Sawyers, but perhaps better known to fame and easier of identification by the classical student, under the less Britannic name of Belisarius. Even this general's career paled in interest for Mr. Boffin before the clearing of his conscience with Wegg; and hence when that literary gentleman had according to custom eaten and drunk until he was all aglow, and when he took up his book with the usual chirping introduction, "And now, Mr. Boffin, sir, we'll decline and we'll fall!" Mr. Boffin stopped him.

"You remember, Wegg, when I first told you that I wanted to make a sort of offer to you?"

"Let me get on my considering cap, sir," replied that gentleman, turning the open book face downward. "When

you first told me that you wanted to make a sort of offer to me? Now let me think" (as if there were the least necessity). "Yes, to be sure I do, Mr. Boffin. It was at my corner. To be sure it was! You had first asked me whether I liked your name, and Candour had compelled a reply in the negative case. I little thought then, sir, how familiar that name would come to be!"

"I hope it will be more familiar still, Wegg."

"Do you, Mr. Boffin? Much obliged to you, I 'm sure. Is it your pleasure, sir, that we decline and we fall?" with a feint of taking up the book.

"Not just yet a while, Wegg. In fact, I have got another offer to make you."

Mr. Wegg (who had had nothing else in his mind for several nights) took off his spectacles with an air of bland surprise.

"And I hope you 'll like it, Wegg."

"Thank you, sir," returned that reticent individual. "I hope it may prove so. On all accounts, I am sure." (This, as a philanthropic aspiration.)

"What do you think," said Mr. Boffin, "of not keeping a stall, Wegg?"

"I think, sir," replied Wegg, "that I should like to be shown the gentleman prepared to make it worth my while!"

"Here he is," said Mr. Boffin.

Mr. Wegg was going to say, My Benefactor, and had said My Bene, when a grandiloquent change came over him.

"No, Mr. Boffin, not you, sir. Anybody but you. Do not fear, Mr. Boffin, that I shall contaminate the premises which your gold has bought, with *my* lowly pursuits. I am aware, sir, that it would not become me to carry on my little traffic under the windows of your mansion. I have already thought of that, and taken my measures. No need to be bought out, sir. Would Stepney Fields be considered intrusive? If not remote enough, I can go remoter. In the words of the poet's song, which I do not quite remember: —

> 'Thrown on the wide world, doom'd to wander and roam,
> Bereft of my parents, bereft of a home,
> A stranger to something and what 's his name joy,
> Behold little Edmund the poor Peasant boy.'

— And equally," said Mr. Wegg, repairing the want of direct

application in the last line, "behold myself on a similar footing!"

"Now, Wegg, Wegg, Wegg," remonstrated the excellent Boffin. "You are too sensitive."

"I know I am, sir," returned Wegg, with obstinate magnanimity. "I am acquainted with my faults. I always was, from a child, too sensitive."

"But listen," pursued the Golden Dustman; "hear me out, Wegg. You have taken it into your head that I mean to pension you off."

"True, sir," returned Wegg, still with an obstinate magnanimity. "I am acquainted with my faults. Far be it from me to deny them. I *have* taken it into my head."

"But I *don't* mean it."

The assurance seemed hardly as comforting to Mr. Wegg as Mr. Boffin intended it to be. Indeed, an appreciable elongation of his visage might have been observed as he replied: —

"Don't you indeed, sir?"

"No," pursued Mr. Boffin; "because that would express, as I understand it, that you were not going to do anything to deserve your money. But you are; you are."

"That, sir," replied Mr. Wegg, cheering up bravely, "is quite another pair of shoes. Now, my independence as a man is again elevated. Now, I no longer

> Weep for the hour,
> When to Boffinses bower,
> The Lord of the valley with offers came;
> Neither does the moon hide her light
> From the heavens to-night,
> And weep behind her clouds o'er any individual in the present Company's shame.

— Please to proceed, Mr. Boffin."

"Thankee, Wegg, both for your confidence in me and for your frequent dropping into poetry; both of which is friendly. Well, then; my idea is, that you should give up your stall, and that I should put you into the Bower here, to keep it for us. It's a pleasant spot; and a man with coals and candles and a pound a week might be in clover here."

"Hem! Would that man, sir, — we will say that man, for the purposes of argueyment," — Mr. Wegg made a smiling demonstration of great perspicuity here, — "would that man, sir,

be expected to throw any other capacity in, or would any other capacity be considered extra? Now let us (for the purposes of argueyment) suppose that man to be engaged as a reader; say (for the purposes of argueyment) in the evening. Would that man's pay as a reader in the evening be added to the other amount, which, adopting your language, we will call clover; or would it emerge into that amount, or clover?"

"Well," said Mr. Boffin, "I suppose it would be added."

"I suppose it would, sir. You are right, sir. Exactly my own views, Mr. Boffin." Here Wegg rose, and, balancing himself on his wooden leg, fluttered over his prey with extended hand. "Mr. Boffin, consider it done. Say no more, sir, not a word more. My stall and I are for ever parted. The collection of ballads will in future be reserved for private study, with the object of making poetry tributary." — Wegg was so proud of having found this word, that he said it again, with a capital letter — "Tributary, to friendship. Mr. Boffin, don't allow yourself to be made uncomfortable by the pang it gives me to part from my stock and stall. Similar emotion was undergone by my own father when promoted for his merits from his occupation as a waterman to a situation under Government. His Christian name was Thomas. His words at the time (I was then an infant, but so deep was their impression on me, that I committed them to memory) were: —

Then farewell my trim-built wherry,
Oars and coat and badge farewell!
Never more at Chelsea Ferry,
Shall your Thomas take a spell!

— My father got over it, Mr. Boffin, and so shall I."

While delivering these valedictory observations, Wegg continually disappointed Mr. Boffin of his hand by flourishing it in the air. He now darted it at his patron, who took it, and felt his mind relieved of a great weight; observing that as they had arranged their joint affairs so satisfactorily, he would now be glad to look into those of Bully Sawyers. Which, indeed, had been left over-night in a very unpromising posture, and for whose impending expedition against the Persians the weather had been by no means favourable all day.

Mr. Wegg resumed his spectacles therefore. But Sawyers was not to be of the party that night; for before Wegg had found his place, Mrs. Boffin's tread was heard upon the stairs,

so unusually heavy and hurried, that Mr. Boffin would have started up at the sound, anticipating some occurrence much out of the common course, even though she had not also called to him in an agitated tone.

Mr. Boffin hurried out, and found her on the dark staircase, panting, with a lighted candle in her hand.

"What 's the matter, my dear?"

"I don't know; I don't know; but I wish you 'd come up stairs."

Much surprised, Mr. Boffin went up stairs and accompanied Mrs. Boffin into their own room; a second large room on the same floor as the room in which the late proprietor had died. Mr. Boffin looked all round him, and saw nothing more unusual than various articles of folded linen on a large chest, which Mrs. Boffin had been sorting.

"What is it, my dear? Why, you 're frightened! *You* frightened?"

"I am not one of that sort certainly," said Mrs. Boffin, as she sat down in a chair to recover herself and took her husband's arm; "but it 's very strange!"

"What is, my dear?"

"Noddy, the faces of the old man and the two children are all over the house to-night."

"My dear?" exclaimed Mr. Boffin. But not without a certain uncomfortable sensation gliding down his back.

"I know it must sound foolish, and yet it is so."

"Where did you think you saw them?"

"I don't know that I think I saw them anywhere. I felt them."

"Touched them?"

"No. Felt them in the air. I was sorting those things on the chest, and not thinking of the old man or the children, but singing to myself, when all in a moment I felt there was a face growing out of the dark."

"What face?" asked her husband, looking about him.

"For a moment it was the old man's, and then it got younger. For a moment it was both the children's, and then it got older. For a moment it was a strange face, and then it was all the faces."

"And then it was gone?"

"Yes; and then it was gone."

"Where were you then, old lady?"

"Here, at the chest. Well; I got the better of it, and went on sorting, and went on singing to myself. 'Lor'!' I says, 'I'll think of something else — something comfortable — and put it out of my head.' So I thought of the new house and Miss Bella Wilfer, and was thinking at a great rate with that sheet there in my hand, when, all of a sudden, the faces seemed to be hidden in among the folds of it, and I let it drop."

As it still lay on the floor where it had fallen, Mr. Boffin picked it up and lay it on the chest.

"And then you ran down stairs?"

"No. I thought I'd try another room and shake it off. I says to myself, 'I'll go and walk slowly up and down the old man's room three times, from end to end, and then I shall have conquered it.' I went in with the candle in my hand; but the moment I came near the bed, the air got thick with them."

"With the faces?"

"Yes, and I even felt they were in the dark behind the side door, and on the little staircase, floating away into the yard. Then I called you."

Mr. Boffin, lost in amazement, looked at Mrs. Boffin. Mrs. Boffin, lost in her own fluttered inability to make this out, looked at Mr. Boffin.

"I think, my dear," said the Golden Dustman, "I'll at once get rid of Wegg for the night, because he's coming to inhabit the Bower, and it might be put into his head or somebody else's, if he heard this and it got about, that the house is haunted. Whereas we know better. Don't we?"

"I never had the feeling in the house before," said Mrs. Boffin; "and I have been about it alone at all hours of the night. I have been in the house when Death was in it, and I have been in the house when Murder was a new part of its adventures, and I never had a fright in it yet."

"And won't again, my dear," said Mr. Boffin. "Depend upon it, it comes of thinking and dwelling on that dark spot."

"Yes; but why did n't it come before?" asked Mrs. Boffin.

This draft on Mr. Boffin's philosophy could only be met by that gentleman with the remark that everything that is at all must begin at some time. Then, tucking his wife's arm under his own, that she might not be left by herself to be troubled again, he descended to release Wegg. Who, being something

drowsy after his plentiful repast, and constitutionally of a shirking temperament, was well enough pleased to stump away, without doing what he had come to do, and was paid for doing.

Mr. Boffin then put on his hat, and Mrs. Boffin her shawl; and the pair, further provided with a bunch of keys and a lighted lantern, went all over the dismal house — dismal everywhere, but in their own two rooms — from cellar to cock-loft. Not resting satisfied with giving that much chase to Mrs. Boffin's fancies, they pursued them into the yard and outbuildings, and under the Mounds. And setting the lantern, when all was done, at the foot of one of the Mounds, they comfortably trotted to and fro for an evening walk, to the end that the murky cobwebs in Mrs. Boffin's brain might be blown away.

"There, my dear!" said Mr. Boffin, when they came in to supper. "That was the treatment, you see. Completely worked round, have n't you?"

"Yes, deary," said Mrs. Boffin, laying aside her shawl. "I'm not nervous any more. I'm not a bit troubled now. I'd go anywhere about the house the same as ever. But —"

"Eh!" said Mr. Boffin.

"But I've only to shut my eyes."

"And what then?"

"Why, then," said Mrs. Boffin, speaking with her eyes closed, and her left hand thoughtfully touching her brow, "then, there they are! The old man's face, and it gets younger. The two children's faces, and they get older. A face that I don't know. And then all the faces!"

Opening her eyes again, and seeing her husband's face across the table, she leaned forward to give it a pat on the cheek, and sat down to supper, declaring it to be the best face in the world.

CHAPTER XVI

MINDERS AND RE-MINDERS

THE Secretary lost no time in getting to work, and his vigilance and method soon set their mark on the Golden Dustman's affairs. His earnestness in determining to understand the length and breadth and depth of every piece of work submitted to him by his employer was as special as his despatch in transacting it. He accepted no information or explanation at second hand, but made himself the master of everything confided to him.

One part of the Secretary's conduct, underlying all the rest, might have been mistrusted by a man with a better knowledge of men than the Golden Dustman had. The Secretary was as far from being inquisitive or intrusive as Secretary could be, but nothing less than a complete understanding of the whole of the affairs would content him. It soon became apparent (from the knowledge with which he set out) that he must have been to the office where the Harmon will was registered, and must have read the will. He anticipated Mr. Boffin's consideration whether he should be advised with on this or that topic, by showing that he already knew of it and understood it. He did this with no attempt at concealment, seeming to be satisfied that it was part of his duty to have prepared himself at all attainable points for its utmost discharge.

This might — let it be repeated — have awakened some little vague mistrust in a man more worldly-wise than the Golden Dustman. On the other hand, the Secretary was discerning, discreet, and silent, though as zealous as if the affairs had been his own. He showed no love of patronage or the command of money, but distinctly preferred resigning both to Mr. Boffin. If, in his limited sphere, he sought power, it was the power of knowledge; the power derivable from a perfect comprehension of his business.

As on the Secretary's face there was a nameless cloud, so on his manner there was a shadow equally indefinable. It was

not that he was embarrassed, as on that first night with the Wilfer family; he was habitually unembarrassed now, and yet the something remained. It was not that his manner was bad, as on that occasion; it was now very good, as being modest, gracious, and ready. Yet the something never left it. It has been written of men who have undergone a cruel captivity, or who have passed through a terrible strait, or who in self-preservation have killed a defenceless fellow-creature, that the record thereof has never faded from their countenances until they died. Was there any such record here?

He established a temporary office for himself in the new house, and all went on well under his hand, with one singular exception. He manifestly objected to communicate with Mr. Boffin's solicitor. Two or three times, when there was some slight occasion for his doing so, he transferred the task to Mr. Boffin; and his evasion of it soon became so curiously apparent, that Mr. Boffin spoke to him on the subject of his reluctance.

"It is so," the Secretary admitted. "I would rather not."

Had he any personal objection to Mr. Lightwood?

"I don't know him."

Had he suffered from law-suits?

"Not more than other men," was his short answer.

Was he prejudiced against the race of lawyers?

"No. But while I am in your employment, sir, I would rather be excused from going between the lawyer and the client. Of course if you press it, Mr. Boffin, I am ready to comply. But I should take it as a great favour if you would not press it without urgent occasion."

Now, it could not be said that there *was* urgent occasion, for Lightwood retained no other affairs in his hands than such as still lingered and languished about the undiscovered criminal, and such as arose out of the purchase of the house. Many other matters that might have travelled to him, now stopped short at the Secretary, under whose administration they were far more expeditiously and satisfactorily disposed of than they would have been if they had got into Young Blight's domain. This the Golden Dustman quite understood. Even the matter immediately in hand was of very little moment as requiring personal appearance on the Secretary's part, for it amounted to no more than this: The death of Hexam rendering the sweat of the honest man's brow unprofitable, the honest man had shuf-

flingly declined to moisten his brow for nothing, with that severe exertion which is known in legal circles as swearing your way through a stone wall. Consequently, that new light had gone sputtering out. But the airing of the old facts had led some one concerned to suggest that it would be well before they were reconsigned to their gloomy shelf — now probably for ever — to induce or compel that Mr. Julius Handford to reappear and be questioned. And all traces of Mr. Julius Handford being lost, Lightwood now referred to his client for authority to seek him through public advertisement.

"Does your objection go to writing to Lightwood, Rokesmith?"

"Not in the least, sir."

"Then perhaps you 'll write him a line, and say he is free to do what he likes. I don't think it promises."

"*I* don't think it promises," said the Secretary.

"Still, he may do what he likes."

"I will write immediately. Let me thank you for so considerately yielding to my disinclination. It may seem less unreasonable, if I avow to you that although I don't know Mr. Lightwood, I have a disagreeable association connected with him. It is not his fault; he is not at all to blame for it, and does not even know my name."

Mr. Boffin dismissed the matter with a nod or two. The letter was written, and next day Mr. Julius Handford was advertised for. He was requested to place himself in communication with Mr. Mortimer Lightwood, as a possible means of furthering the ends of justice, and a reward was offered to any one acquainted with his whereabout who would communicate the same to the said Mr. Mortimer Lightwood at his office in the Temple. Every day for six weeks this advertisement appeared at the head of all the newspapers, and every day for six weeks the Secretary, when he saw it, said to himself, in the tone in which he had said to his employer, — "*I* don't think it promises!"

Among his first occupations the pursuit of that orphan wanted by Mrs. Boffin held a conspicuous place. From the earliest moment of his engagement he showed a particular desire to please her, and, knowing her to have this object at heart, he followed it up with unwearying alacrity and interest.

Mr. and Mrs. Milvey had found their search a difficult one.

Either an eligible orphan was of the wrong sex (which almost always happened) or was too old, or too young, or too sickly, or too dirty, or too much accustomed to the streets, or too likely to run away; or it was found impossible to complete the philanthropic transaction without buying the orphan. For the instant it became known that anybody wanted the orphan, up started some affectionate relative of the orphan who put a price upon the orphan's head. The suddenness of an orphan's rise in the market was not to be paralleled by the maddest records of the Stock Exchange. He would be at five thousand per cent. discount out at nurse making a mud pie at nine in the morning, and (being inquired for) would go up to five thousand per cent. premium before noon. The market was "rigged" in various artful ways. Counterfeit stock got into circulation. Parents boldly represented themselves as dead, and brought their orphans with them. Genuine orphan-stock was surreptitiously withdrawn from the market. It being announced, by emissaries posted for the purpose, that Mr. and Mrs. Milvey were coming down the court, orphan scrip would be instantly concealed, and production refused, save on a condition usually stated by the brokers as "a gallon of beer." Likewise, fluctuations of a wild and South-Sea nature were occasioned, by orphan-holders keeping back, and then rushing into the market a dozen together. But the uniform principle at the root of all these various operations was bargain and sale; and that principle could not be recognized by Mr. and Mrs. Milvey.

At length tidings were received by the Reverend Frank of a charming orphan to be found at Brentford. One of the deceased parents (late his parishioners) had a poor widowed grandmother in that agreeable town, and she, Mrs. Betty Higden, had carried off the orphan with maternal care, but could not afford to keep him.

The Secretary proposed to Mrs. Boffin, either to go down himself and take a preliminary survey of this orphan, or to drive her down, that she might at once form her own opinion. Mrs. Boffin preferring the latter course, they set off one morning in a hired phaeton, conveying the hammer-headed young man behind them.

The abode of Mrs. Betty Higden was not easy to find, lying in such complicated back settlements of muddy Brentford that they left their equipage at the sign of the Three Magpies, and

went in search of it on foot. After many inquiries and defeats, there was pointed out to them in a lane, a very small cottage residence, with a board across the open doorway, hooked on to which board by the armpits was a young gentleman of tender years, angling for mud with a headless wooden horse and line. In this young sportsman, distinguished by a crisply curling auburn head and a bluff countenance, the Secretary descried the orphan.

It unfortunately happened as they quickened their pace that the orphan, lost to considerations of personal safety in the ardour of the moment, overbalanced himself and toppled into the street. Being an orphan of a chubby conformation, he then took to rolling, and had rolled into the gutter before they could come up. From the gutter he was rescued by John Rokesmith, and thus the first meeting with Mrs. Higden was inaugurated by the awkward circumstance of their being in possession — one would say at first sight unlawful possession — of the orphan, upside down and purple in the countenance. The board across the doorway too, acting as a trap equally for the feet of Mrs. Higden coming out, and the feet of Mrs. Boffin and John Rokesmith going in, greatly increased the difficulty of the situation; to which the cries of the orphan imparted a lugubrious and inhuman character.

At first, it was impossible to explain, on account of the orphan's "holding his breath;" a most terrific proceeding, superinducing in the orphan lead-colour rigidity and a deadly silence, compared with which his cries were music yielding the height of enjoyment. But as he gradually recovered, Mrs. Boffin gradually introduced herself, and smiling peace was gradually wooed back to Mrs. Betty Higden's home.

It was then perceived to be a small home with a large mangle in it, at the handle of which machine stood a very long boy, with a very little head, and an open mouth of disproportionate capacity that seemed to assist his eyes in staring at the visitors. In a corner below the mangle, on a couple of stools, sat two very little children; a boy and a girl; and when the very long boy, in an interval of staring, took a turn at the mangle, it was alarming to see how it lunged itself at those two innocents, like a catapult designed for their destruction, harmlessly retiring when within an inch of their heads. The room was clean and neat. It had a brick floor, and a window of diamond panes, and

a flounce hanging below the chimney-piece, and strings nailed from bottom to top outside the window on which scarlet-beans were to grow in the coming season if the Fates were propitious. However propitious they might have been in the seasons that were gone, to Betty Higden in the matter of beans, they had not been very favourable in the matter of coins; for it was easy to see that she was poor.

She was one of those old women, was Mrs. Betty Higden, who by dint of an indomitable purpose and a strong constitution fight out many years, though each year has come with its new knock-down blows fresh to the fight against her, wearied by it; an active old woman, with a bright dark eye and a resolute face, yet quite a tender creature too; not a logically reasoning woman, but God is good, and hearts may count in Heaven as high as heads.

"Yes, sure!" said she when the business was opened, "Mrs. Milvey had the kindness to write to me, ma'am, and I got Sloppy to read it. It was a pretty letter. But she 's an affable lady."

The visitors glanced at the long boy, who seemed to indicate by a broader stare of his mouth and eyes that in him Sloppy stood confessed.

"For I ain't, you must know," said Betty, "much of a hand at reading writing-hand, though I can read my Bible and most print. And I do love a newspaper. You might n't think it, but Sloppy is a beautiful reader of a newspaper. He do the Police in different voices."

The visitors again considered it a point of politeness to look at Sloppy, who, looking at them, suddenly threw back his head, extended his mouth to its utmost width, and laughed loud and long. At this the two innocents, with their brains in that apparent danger, laughed, and Mrs. Higden laughed, and the orphan laughed, and then the visitors laughed. Which was more cheerful than intelligible.

Then Sloppy seeming to be seized with an industrious mania or fury, turned to at the mangle, and impelled it at the heads of the innocents with such a creaking and rumbling, that Mrs. Higden stopped him.

"The gentlefolks can't hear themselves speak, Sloppy. Bide a bit, bide a bit!"

"Is that the dear child in your lap?" said Mrs. Boffin.

"Yes, ma'am, this is Johnny."

"Johnny to!" cried Mrs. Boffin, turning to the Secretary; "already Johnny! Only one of the two names left to give him! He 's a pretty boy."

With his chin tucked down in his shy childish manner, he was looking furtively at Mrs. Boffin out of his blue eyes, and reaching his fat dimpled hand up to the lips of the old woman, who was kissing it by times.

"Yes, ma'am, he 's a pretty boy, he 's a dear darling boy, he 's the child of my own last left daughter's daughter. But she 's gone the way of all the rest."

"Those are not his brother and sister?" said Mrs. Boffin.

"Oh, dear no, ma'am. Those are Minders."

"Minders?" the Secretary repeated.

"Left to be Minded, sir. I keep a Minding-School. I can take only three, on account of the Mangle. But I love children, and Fourpence a week is Fourpence. Come here, Toddles and Poddles."

Toddles was the pet name of the boy; Poddles of the girl. At their little unsteady pace, they came across the floor, hand in hand, as if they were traversing an extremely difficult road intersected by brooks, and, when they had had their heads patted by Mrs. Betty Higden, made lunges at the orphan, dramatically representing an attempt to bear him, crowing, into captivity and slavery. All the three children enjoyed this to a delightful extent, and the sympathetic Sloppy again laughed long and loud. When it was discreet to stop the play, Betty Higden said, "Go to your seats, Toddles and Poddles," and they returned hand in hand across country, seeming to find the brooks rather swollen by late rains.

"And Master — or Mister — Sloppy?" said the Secretary, in doubt whether he was man, boy, or what.

"A love-child," returned Betty Higden, dropping her voice; "parents never known; found in the street. He was brought up in the" — with a shiver of repugnance — "the House."

"The Poorhouse?" said the Secretary.

Mrs. Higden set that resolute old face of hers, and darkly nodded yes.

"You dislike the mention of it."

"Dislike the mention of it?" answered the old woman. "Kill me sooner than take me there. Throw this pretty child under cart-horses' feet and a loaded wagon sooner than take

him there. Come to us and find us all a dying, and set a light to us all where we lie, and let us all blaze away with the house into a heap of cinders sooner than move a corpse of us there!"

A surprising spirit in this lonely woman after so many years of hard working, and hard living, my Lords and Gentlemen and Honourable Boards! What is it that we call it in our grandiose speeches? British independence, rather perverted? Is that, or something like it, the ring of the cant?

"Do I never read in the newspapers," said the dame, fondling the child — "God help me and the like of me! — how the worn-out people that do come down to that get driven from post to pillar and pillar to post, a purpose to tire them out! Do I never read how they are put off, put off, put off — how they are grudged, grudged, grudged, the shelter, or the doctor, or the drop of physic, or the bit of bread? Do I never read how they grow heartsick of it and give it up, after having let themselves drop so low, and how they after all die out for want of help? Then I say, I hope I can die as well as another, and I'll die without that disgrace."

Absolutely impossible, my Lords and Gentlemen and Honourable Boards, by any stretch of legislative wisdom to set these perverse people right in their logic?

"Johnny, my pretty," continued old Betty, caressing the child, and rather mourning over it than speaking to it, "your old Granny Betty is nigher fourscore year than threescore and ten. She never begged nor had a penny of the Union money in all her life. She paid scot and she paid lot when she had money to pay; she worked when she could, and she starved when she must. You pray that your Granny may have strength enough left her at the last (she's strong for an old one, Johnny), to get up from her bed and run and hide herself, and swown to death in a hole, sooner than fall into the hands of those Cruel Jacks we read of, that dodge and drive, and worry and weary, and scorn and shame, the decent poor."

A brilliant success, my Lords and Gentlemen and Honourable Boards, to have brought it to this in the minds of the best of the poor! Under submission, might it be worth thinking of, at any odd time?

The fright and abhorrence that Mrs. Betty Higden smoothed out of her strong face as she ended this diversion showed how seriously she had meant it.

"And does he work for you?" asked the Secretary, gently bringing the discourse back to Master or Mister Sloppy.

"Yes," said Betty, with a good-humoured smile and nod of the head. "And well too."

"Does he live here?"

"He lives more here than anywhere. He was thought to be no better than a Natural, and first come to me as a Minder. I made interest with Mr. Blogg the Beadle to have him as a Minder, seeing him by chance up at church, and thinking I might do something with him. For he was a weak rickety creetur then."

"Is he called by his right name?"

"Why, you see, speaking quite correctly, he has no right name. I always understood he took his name from being found on a Sloppy night."

"He seems an amiable fellow."

"Bless you, sir, there 's not a bit of him," returned Betty, "that 's not amiable. So you may judge how amiable he is, by running your eye along his heighth."

Of an ungainly make was Sloppy. Too much of him longwise, too little of him broadwise, and too many sharp angles of him anglewise. One of those shambling male human creatures, born to be indiscreetly candid in the revelation of buttons; every button he had about him glaring at the public to a quite preternatural extent. A considerable capital of knee and elbow and wrist and ankle, had Sloppy, and he did n't know how to dispose of it to the best advantage, but was always investing it in wrong securities, and so getting himself into embarrassed circumstances. Full-Private Number One in the Awkward Squad of the rank and file of life, was Sloppy, and yet had his glimmering notions of standing true to the Colours.

"And now," said Mrs. Boffin, "concerning Johnny."

As Johnny, with his chin tucked in and his lips pouting, reclined in Betty's lap, concentrating his blue eyes on the visitors and shading them from observation with a dimpled arm, old Betty took one of his fresh fat hands in her withered right, and fell to gently beating it on her withered left.

"Yes, ma'am. Concerning Johnny."

"If you trust the dear child to me," said Mrs. Boffin, with a face inviting trust, "he shall have the best of homes, the best of care, the best of education, the best of friends. Please God, I will be a true, good mother to him!"

"I am thankful to you, ma'am, and the dear child would be thankful if he was old enough to understand." Still lightly beating the little hand upon her own. "I would n't stand in the dear child's light, not if I had all my life before me instead of a very little of it. But I hope you won't take it ill that I cleave to the child closer than words can tell, for he 's the last living thing left me."

"Take it ill, my dear soul? Is it likely? And you so tender of him as to bring him home here!"

"I have seen," said Betty, still with that light beat upon her hard rough hand, "so many of them on my lap. And they are all gone but this one! I am ashamed to seem so selfish, but I don't really mean it. It 'll be the making of his fortune, and he 'll be a gentleman when I am dead. I — I — don't know what comes over me. I — try against it. Don't notice me!" The light beat stopped, the resolute mouth gave way, and the fine, strong old face broke up into weakness and tears.

Now, greatly to the relief of the visitors, the emotional Sloppy no sooner beheld his patroness in this condition, than throwing back his head and throwing open his mouth, he lifted up his voice and bellowed. This alarming note of something wrong instantly terrified Toddles and Poddles, who were no sooner heard to roar surprisingly, than Johnny, curving himself the wrong way and striking out at Mrs. Boffin with a pair of indifferent shoes, became a prey to despair. The absurdity of the situation put its pathos to the rout. Mrs. Betty Higden was herself in a moment, and brought them all to order with that speed, that Sloppy, stopping short in a polysyllabic bellow, transferred his energy to the mangle, and had taken several penitential turns before he could be stopped.

"There, there, there!" said Mrs. Boffin, almost regarding her kind self as the most ruthless of women. "Nothing is going to be done. Nobody need be frightened. We 're all comfortable; ain't we, Mrs. Higden?"

"Sure and certain we are," returned Betty.

"And there really is no hurry, you know," said Mrs. Boffin in a lower voice. "Take time to think of it, my good creature!"

"Don't you fear *me* no more, ma'am," said Betty; "I thought of it for good yesterday. I don't know what come over me just now, but it 'll never come again."

"Well, then, Johnny shall have more time to think of it," returned Mrs. Boffin; "the pretty child shall have time to get used to it. And you'll get him more used to it, if you think well of it; won't you?"

Betty undertook that, cheerfully and readily.

"Lor'," cried Mrs. Boffin, looking radiantly about her, "we want to make everybody happy, not dismal! — And perhaps you would n't mind letting me know how used to it you begin to get, and how it all goes on?"

"I'll send Sloppy," said Mrs. Higden.

"And this gentleman who has come with me will pay him for his trouble," said Mrs. Boffin. "And Mr. Sloppy, whenever you come to my house, be sure you never go away without having had a good dinner of meat, beer, vegetables, and pudding."

This still further brightened the face of affairs; for the highly sympathetic Sloppy, first broadly staring and grinning, and then roaring with laughter, Toddles and Poddles followed suit, and Johnny trumped the trick. T. and P. considering these favourable circumstances for the resumption of that dramatic descent upon Johnny, again came across-country hand in hand upon a buccaneering expedition; and this having been fought out in the chimney corner behind Mrs. Higden's chair, with great valour on both sides, those desperate pirates returned hand in hand to their stools, across the dry bed of a mountain torrent.

"You must tell me what I can do for you, Betty, my friend," said Mrs. Boffin confidentially, "if not to-day, next time."

"Thank you all the same, ma'am, but I want nothing for myself. I can work. I'm strong. I can walk twenty mile if I'm put to it." Old Betty was proud, and said it with a sparkle in her bright eyes.

"Yes, but there are some little comforts that you would n't be the worse for," returned Mrs. Boffin. "Bless ye, I was n't born a lady any more than you."

"It seems to me," said Betty, smiling, "that you were born a lady, and a true one, or there never was a lady born. But I could n't take anything from you, my dear. I never did take anything from any one. It ain't that I'm not grateful, but I love to earn it better."

"Well, well!" returned Mrs. Boffin. "I only spoke of little things, or I would n't have taken the liberty."

Betty put her visitor's hand to her lips, in acknowledgment of the delicate answer. Wonderfully upright her figure was, and wonderfully self-reliant her look, as, standing facing her visitor, she explained herself further.

"If I could have kept the dear child, without the dread that 's always upon me of his coming to that fate I have spoken of, I could never have parted with him, even to you. For I love him, I love him, I love him! I love my husband long dead and gone, in him; I love my children dead and gone, in him; I love my young and hopeful days dead and gone, in him. I could n't sell that love, and look you in your bright, kind face. It 's a free gift. I am in want of nothing. When my strength fails me, if I can but die out quick and quiet, I shall be quite content. I have stood between my dead and that shame I have spoken of, and it has been kept off from every one of them. Sewed into my gown" — with her hand upon her breast — "is just enough to lay me in the grave. Only see that it 's rightly spent, so as I may rest free to the last from that cruelty and disgrace, and you 'll have done much more than a little thing for me, and all that in this present world my heart is set upon."

Mrs. Betty Higden's visitor pressed her hand. There was no more breaking up of the strong old face into weakness. My Lords and Gentlemen and Honourable Boards, it really was as composed as our own faces, and almost as dignified.

And now Johnny was to be inveigled into occupying a temporary position on Mrs. Boffin's lap. It was not until he had been piqued into competition with the two diminutive Minders, by seeing them successively raised to that post and retire from it without injury, that he could be by any means induced to leave Mrs. Betty Higden's skirts; towards which he exhibited, even when in Mrs. Boffin's embrace, strong yearnings, spiritual and bodily; the former expressed in a very gloomy visage, the latter in extended arms. However, a general description of the toy wonders lurking in Mrs. Boffin's house so far conciliated this worldly minded orphan as to induce him to stare at her frowningly, with a fist in his mouth, and even at length to chuckle when a richly caparisoned horse on wheels, with a miraculous gift of cantering to cake-shops, was mentioned. This sound being taken up by the Minders swelled into a rapturous trio which gave general satisfaction.

So the interview was considered very successful, and Mrs. Boffin was pleased, and all were satisfied. Not least of all, Sloppy, who undertook to conduct the visitors back by the best way to the Three Magpies, and whom the hammer-headed young man much despised.

This piece of business thus put in train, the Secretary drove Mrs. Boffin back to the Bower, and found employment for himself at the new house until evening. Whether, when evening came, he took a way to his lodgings that led through fields, with any design of finding Miss Bella Wilfer in those fields, is not so certain as that she regularly walked there at that hour.

And, moreover, it is certain that there she was.

No longer in mourning, Miss Bella was dressed in as pretty colours as she could muster. There is no denying that she was as pretty as they, and that she and the colours went very prettily together. She was reading as she walked, and of course it is to be inferred, from her showing no knowledge of Mr. Rokesmith's approach, that she did not know he was approaching.

"Eh?" said Miss Bella, raising her eyes from her book when he stopped before her. "Oh! It's you."

"Only I. A fine evening!"

"Is it?" said Bella, looking coldly around. "I suppose it is, now you mention it. I have not been thinking of the evening."

"So intent upon your book?"

"Ye-e-es," replied Bella, with a drawl of indifference.

"A love story, Miss Wilfer?"

"Oh dear, no, or I should n't be reading it. It's more about money than anything else."

"And does it say that money is better than anything?"

"Upon my word," returned Bella, "I forget what it says, but you can find out for yourself, if you like, Mr. Rokesmith. I don't want it any more."

The Secretary took the book — she had fluttered the leaves as if it were a fan — and walked beside her.

"I am charged with a message for you, Miss Wilfer."

"Impossible, I think!" said Bella, with another drawl.

"From Mrs. Boffin. She desired me to assure you of the pleasure she has in finding that she will be ready to receive you in another week or two at furthest."

Bella turned her head towards him, with her prettily insolent eyebrows raised, and her eyelids drooping. As much as to say, "How did *you* come by the message, pray?"

"I have been waiting for an opportunity of telling you that I am Mr. Boffin's Secretary."

"I am as wise as ever," said Miss Bella loftily, "for I don't know what a Secretary is. Not that it signifies."

"Not at all."

A covert glance at her face, as he walked beside her, showed him that she had not expected his ready assent to that proposition.

"Then are you going to be always there, Mr. Rokesmith?" she inquired, as if that would be a drawback.

"Always? No. Very much there? Yes."

"Dear me!" drawled Bella, in a tone of mortification.

"But my position there as Secretary will be very different from yours as guest. You will know little or nothing about me. I shall transact the business; you will transact the pleasure. I shall have my salary to earn; you will have nothing to do but to enjoy and attract."

"Attract, sir?" said Bella, again with her eyebrows raised, and her eyelids drooping. "I don't understand you."

Without replying on this point, Mr. Rokesmith went on.

"Excuse me; when I first saw you in your black dress —"

("There!" was Miss Bella's mental exclamation. "What did I say to them at home? Everybody noticed that ridiculous mourning.")

"When I first saw you in your black dress, I was at a loss to account for that distinction between yourself and your family. I hope it was not impertinent to speculate upon it?"

"I hope not, I am sure," said Miss Bella haughtily. "But you ought to know best how you speculated upon it."

Mr. Rokesmith inclined his head in a deprecatory manner, and went on.

"Since I have been intrusted with Mr. Boffin's affairs, I have necessarily come to understand the little mystery. I venture to remark that much of your loss may be repaired. I speak, of course, merely of wealth, Miss Wilfer. The loss of a perfect stranger, whose worth, or worthlessness, I cannot estimate, — nor you either, — is beside the question. But this excellent gentleman and lady are so full of simplicity, so full of gener-

osity, so inclined towards you, and so desirous to — how shall I express it? — to make amends for their good fortune, that you have only to respond."

As he watched her with another covert look, he saw a certain ambitious triumph in her face which no assumed coldness could conceal.

"As we have been brought under one roof by an accidental combination of circumstances, which oddly extends itself to the new relations before us, I have taken the liberty of saying these few words. You don't consider them intrusive, I hope?" said the Secretary, with deference.

"Really, Mr. Rokesmith, I can't say what I consider them," returned the young lady. "They are perfectly new to me, and may be founded altogether on your own imagination."

"You will see."

These same fields were opposite the Wilfer premises. The discreet Mrs. Wilfer, now looking out of window and beholding her daughter in conference with her lodger, instantly tied up her head and came out for a casual walk.

"I have been telling Miss Wilfer," said John Rokesmith, as the majestic lady came stalking up, "that I have become, by a curious chance, Mr. Boffin's Secretary or man of business."

"I have not," returned Mrs. Wilfer, waving her gloves in her chronic state of dignity and vague ill-usage, "the honour of any intimate acquaintance with Mr. Boffin, and it is not for me to congratulate that gentleman on the acquisition he has made."

"A poor one enough," said Rokesmith.

"Pardon me," returned Mrs. Wilfer, "the merits of Mr. Boffin may be highly distinguished — may be more distinguished than the countenance of Mrs. Boffin would imply — but it were the insanity of humility to deem him worthy of a better assistant."

"You are very good. I have also been telling Miss Wilfer that she is expected very shortly at the new residence in town."

"Having tacitly consented," said Mrs. Wilfer, with a grand shrug of her shoulders and another wave of her gloves, "to my child's acceptance of the proffered attentions of Mrs. Boffin, I interpose no objection."

Here Miss Bella offered the remonstrance: "Don't talk nonsense, ma, please."

"Peace!" said Mrs. Wilfer.

"No, ma, I am not going to be made so absurd. Interposing objections!"

"I say," repeated Mrs. Wilfer, with a vast access of grandeur, "that I am *not* going to interpose objections. If Mrs. Boffin (to whose countenance no disciple of Lavater could possibly for a single moment subscribe)" — with a shiver — "seeks to illuminate her new residence in town with the attractions of a child of mine, I am content that she should be favoured by the company of a child of mine."

"You use the word, ma'am, I have myself used," said Rokesmith, with a glance at Bella, "when you speak of Miss Wilfer's attractions there."

"Pardon me," returned Mrs. Wilfer, with dreadful solemnity, "but I had not finished."

"Pray excuse me."

"I was about to say," pursued Mrs. Wilfer, who clearly had not had the faintest idea of saying anything more, "that when I use the term attractions, I do so with the qualification that I do not mean it in any way whatever."

The excellent lady delivered this luminous elucidation of her views with an air of greatly obliging her hearers, and greatly distinguishing herself. Whereat Miss Bella laughed a scornful little laugh, and said: —

"Quite enough about this, I am sure, on all sides. Have the goodness, Mr. Rokesmith, to give my love to Mrs. Boffin —"

"Pardon me!" cried Mrs. Wilfer. "Compliments."

"Love!" repeated Bella, with a little stamp of her foot.

"No!" said Mrs. Wilfer monotonously. "Compliments."

("Say Miss Wilfer's love, and Mrs. Wilfer's compliments," the Secretary proposed, as a compromise.)

"And I shall be very glad to come when she is ready for me. The sooner, the better."

"One last word, Bella," said Mrs. Wilfer, "before descending to the family apartment. I trust that as a child of mine you will ever be sensible that it will be graceful in you, when associating with Mr. and Mrs. Boffin upon equal terms, to remember that the Secretary, Mr. Rokesmith, as your father's lodger, has a claim on your good word."

The condescension with which Mrs. Wilfer delivered this

proclamation of patronage was as wonderful as the swiftness with which the lodger had lost caste in the Secretary. He smiled as the mother retired down stairs; but his face fell as the daughter followed.

"So insolent, so trivial, so capricious, so mercenary, so careless, so hard to touch, so hard to turn!" he said bitterly.

And added as he went up stairs, "And yet so pretty, so pretty!"

And added presently, as he walked to and fro in his room, "And if she knew!"

She knew that he was shaking the house by his walking to and fro; and she declared it another of the miseries of being poor that you could n't get rid of a haunting Secretary, stump — stump — stumping overhead in the dark, like a Ghost.

CHAPTER XVII

A DISMAL SWAMP

And now, in the blooming summer days, behold Mr. and Mrs. Boffin established in the eminently aristocratic family mansion, and behold all manner of crawling, creeping, fluttering, and buzzing creatures, attracted by the gold dust of the Golden Dustman!

Foremost among those leaving cards at the eminently aristocratic door before it is quite painted are the Veneerings; out of breath, one might imagine, from the impetuosity of their rush to the eminently aristocratic steps. One copper-plate Mrs. Veneering, two copper-plate Mr. Veneerings, and a connubial copper-plate Mr. and Mrs. Veneering, requesting the honour of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin's company at dinner with the utmost Analytical solemnities. The enchanting Lady Tippins leaves a card. Twemlow leaves cards. A tall custard-coloured phaeton tooling up in a solemn manner leaves four cards, to wit, a couple of Mr. Podsnaps, a Mrs. Podsnap, and a Miss Podsnap. All the world and his wife and daughter leave cards. Sometimes the world's wife has so many daughters that her card reads rather like a Miscellaneous Lot at an Auction; comprising Mrs. Tapkins, Miss Tapkins, Miss Frederica Tapkins, Miss Antonina Tapkins, Miss Malvina Tapkins, and Miss Euphemia Tapkins; at the same time the same lady leaves the card of Mrs. Henry George Alfred Swoshle, *née* Tapkins; also a card, Mrs. Tapkins at Home, Wednesdays, Music, Portland Place.

Miss Bella Wilfer becomes an inmate, for an indefinite period, of the eminently aristocratic dwelling. Mrs. Boffin bears Miss Bella away to her Milliner's and Dressmaker's, and she gets beautifully dressed. The Veneerings find with swift remorse that they have omitted to invite Miss Bella Wilfer. One Mrs. Veneering and one Mr. and Mrs. Veneering requesting that additional honour instantly do penance in white cardboard on the hall table. Mrs. Tapkins likewise discovers her omis-

sion, and with promptitude repairs it: for herself, for Miss Tapkins, for Miss Frederica Tapkins, for Miss Antonina Tapkins, for Miss Malvina Tapkins, and for Miss Euphemia Tapkins. Likewise, for Mrs. Henry George Alfred Swoshle, *née* Tapkins. Likewise, for Mrs. Tapkins at Home, Wednesdays, Music, Portland Place.

Tradesmen's books hunger, and Tradesmen's mouths water, for the gold dust of the Golden Dustman. As Mrs. Boffin and Miss Wilfer drive out, or as Mr. Boffin walks out at his jog-trot pace, the fishmonger pulls off his hat with an air of reverence founded on conviction. His men cleanse their fingers on their woollen aprons before presuming to touch their foreheads to Mr. Boffin or Lady. The gaping salmon and the golden mullet lying on the slab seem to turn up their eyes sideways, as they would turn up their hands if they had any in worshipping admiration. The butcher, though a portly and a prosperous man, does n't know what to do with himself, so anxious is he to express humility when discovered by the passing Boffins taking the air in a mutton grove. Presents are made to the Boffin servants, and bland strangers with business cards, meeting said servants in the street, offer hypothetical corruption. As, "Supposing I was to be favoured with an order from Mr. Boffin, my dear friend, it would be worth my while" — to do a certain thing that I hope might not prove wholly disagreeable to your feelings.

But no one knows so well as the Secretary, who opens and reads the letters, what a set is made at the man marked by a stroke of notoriety. Oh, the varieties of dust for ocular use offered in exchange for the gold dust of the Golden Dustman! Fifty-seven churches to be erected with half-crowns, forty-two parsonage houses to be repaired with shillings, seven-and-twenty organs to be built with halfpence, twelve hundred children to be brought up on postage stamps. Not that a half-crown, shilling, halfpenny, or postage stamp would be particularly acceptable from Mr. Boffin, but that it is so obvious he is the man to make up the deficiency. And then the charities, my Christian brother! And mostly in difficulties, yet mostly lavish, too, in the expensive articles of print and paper. Large fat private double letter, sealed with ducal coronet. "Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire. My Dear Sir, — Having consented to preside at the forthcoming Annual Dinner of the Family Party Fund, and

feeling deeply impressed with the immense usefulness of that noble Institution and the great importance of its being supported by a List of Stewards that shall prove to the public the interest taken in it by popular and distinguished men, I have undertaken to ask you to become a Steward on that occasion. Soliciting your favourable reply before the 14th instant, I am, my dear sir, your faithful servant, LINSEED. P. S. The Steward's fee is limited to three Guineas." Friendly this, on the part of the Duke of Linseed (and thoughtful in the postscript), only lithographed by the hundred and presenting but a pale individuality of address to Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, in quite another hand. It takes two noble Earls and a Viscount, combined, to inform Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, in an equally flattering manner, that an estimable lady in the West of England has offered to present a purse containing twenty pounds to the Society for Granting Annuities to Unassuming Members of the Middle Classes, if twenty individuals will previously present purses of one hundred pounds each. And those benevolent noblemen very kindly point out that if Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, should wish to present two or more purses, it will not be inconsistent with the design of the estimable lady in the West of England, provided each purse be coupled with the name of some member of his honoured and respected family.

These are the corporate beggars. But there are, besides, the individual beggars; and how does the heart of the Secretary fail him when he has to cope with *them!* And they must be coped with to some extent, because they all inclose documents (they call their scraps documents; but they are, as to papers deserving the name, what minced veal is to a calf), the non-return of which would be their ruin. That is to say, they are utterly ruined now, but they would be more utterly ruined then. Among these correspondents are several daughters of general officers, long accustomed to every luxury of life (except spelling), who little thought, when their gallant fathers waged war in the Peninsula, that they would ever have to appeal to those whom Providence, in its inscrutable wisdom, has blessed with untold gold, and from among whom they select the name of Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, for a maiden effort in this wise, understanding that he has such a heart as never was. The Secretary learns, too, that confidence between man and wife would seem to obtain but rarely when virtue is in distress, so numerous are the wives

who take up their pens to ask Mr. Boffin for money without the knowledge of their devoted husbands, who would never permit it; while, on the other hand, so numerous are the husbands who take up their pens to ask Mr. Boffin for money without the knowledge of their devoted wives, who would instantly go out of their senses if they had the least suspicion of the circumstance. There are the inspired beggars, too. These were sitting, only yesterday evening, musing over a fragment of candle which must soon go out and leave them in the dark for the rest of their nights, when surely some Angel whispered the name of Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, to their souls, imparting rays of hope, nay confidence, to which they had long been strangers! Akin to these are the suggestively befriended beggars. They were partaking of a cold potato and water by the flickering and gloomy light of a lucifer-match, in their lodgings (rent considerably in arrear, and heartless landlady threatening expulsion "like a dog" into the streets), when a gifted friend, happening to look in, said, "Write immediately to Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire," and would take no denial. There are the nobly independent beggars, too. These, in the days of their abundance, ever regarded gold as dross, and have not yet got over that only impediment in the way of their amassing wealth, but they want no dross from Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire; No, Mr. Boffin; the world may term it pride, paltry pride if you will, but they would n't take it if you offered it; a loan, sir, — for fourteen weeks to the day, interest calculated at the rate of five per cent. per annum, to be bestowed upon any charitable institution you may name, — is all they want of you, and if you have the meanness to refuse it, count on being despised by these great spirits. There are the beggars of punctual business habits, too. These will make an end of themselves at a quarter to one P. M. on Tuesday, if no post-office order is in the interim received from Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire; arriving after a quarter to one P. M. on Tuesday, it need not be sent, as they will then (having made an exact memorandum of the heartless circumstances) be "cold in death." There are the beggars on horseback, too, in another sense from the sense of the proverb. These are mounted and ready to start on the highway to affluence. The goal is before them, the road is in the best condition, their spurs are on, the steed is willing, but, at the last moment, for want of some special thing — a clock, a violin, an astronomical telescope, an electrify-

ing machine — they must dismount for ever, unless they receive its equivalent in money from Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire. Less given to detail are the beggars who make sporting ventures. These, usually to be addressed in reply under initials at a country post-office, inquire in feminine hands, Dare one who cannot disclose herself to Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, but whose name might startle him were it revealed, solicit the immediate advance of two hundred pounds from unexpected riches exercising their noblest privilege in the trust of a common humanity?

In such a Dismal Swamp does the new house stand, and through it does the Secretary daily struggle breast-high. Not to mention all the people alive who have made inventions that won't act, and all the jobbers who job in all the jobberies jobbed; though these may be regarded as the Alligators of the Dismal Swamp, and are always lying by to drag the Golden Dustman under.

But the old house. There are no designs against the Golden Dustman there? There are no fish of the shark tribe in the Bower waters? Perhaps not. Still, Wegg is established there, and would seem, judged by his secret proceedings, to cherish a notion of making a discovery. For when a man with a wooden leg lies prone on his stomach to peep under bedsteads; and hops up ladders, like some extinct bird, to survey the tops of presses and cupboards; and provides himself an iron rod which he is always poking and prodding into dust mounds, the probability is that he expects to find something.

BOOK THE SECOND: BIRDS OF A FEATHER

CHAPTER I

OF AN EDUCATIONAL CHARACTER

THE school at which young Charley Hexam had first learned from a book — the streets being, for pupils of his degree, the great Preparatory Establishment in which very much that is never unlearned is learned without and before book — was a miserable loft in an unsavoury yard. Its atmosphere was oppressive and disagreeable; it was crowded, noisy, and confusing; half the pupils dropped asleep, or fell into a state of waking stupefaction; the other half kept them in either condition by maintaining a monotonous, droning noise, as if they were performing, out of time and tune, on a ruder sort of bagpipe. The teachers, animated solely by good intentions, had no idea of execution, and a lamentable jumble was the upshot of their kind endeavours.

It was a school for all ages, and for both sexes. The latter were kept apart, and the former were partitioned off into square assortments. But all the place was pervaded by a grimly ludicrous pretence that every pupil was childish and innocent. This pretence, much favoured by the lady visitors, led to the ghastliest absurdities. Young women, old in the vices of the commonest and worst life, were expected to profess themselves enthralled by the good child's book, the Adventures of Little Margery, who resided in the village cottage by the mill; severely reproved and morally squashed the miller, when she was five and he was fifty; divided her porridge with singing birds; denied herself a new nankeen bonnet, on the ground that the turnips did not wear nankeen bonnets, neither did the sheep who ate them; who plaited straw and delivered the dreariest orations to all comers, at all sorts of unseasonable times. So unwieldy young dredgers and hulking mud-larks were referred to the experiences of Thomas Twopence, who, having resolved

not to rob (under circumstances of uncommon atrocity) his particular friend and benefactor of eighteenpence, presently came into supernatural possession of three and sixpence, and lived a shining light ever afterwards. (Note, that the benefactor came to no good.) Several swaggering sinners had written their own biographies in the same strain; it always appearing from the lessons of those very boastful persons that you were to do good, not because it *was* good, but because you were to make a good thing of it. Contrariwise, the adult pupils were taught to read (if they could learn) out of the New Testament; and by dint of stumbling over the syllables, and keeping their bewildered eyes on the particular syllables coming round to their turn, were as absolutely ignorant of the sublime history as if they had never seen or heard of it. An exceedingly and confoundingly perplexing jumble of a school, in fact, where black spirits and grey, red spirits and white, jumbled, jumbled, jumbled, jumbled, jumbled every night. And particularly every Sunday night. For then an inclined plane of unfortunate infants would be handed over to the prosiest and worst of all the teachers with good intentions, whom nobody older would endure. Who, taking his stand on the floor before them as chief executioner, would be attended by a conventional volunteer boy as executioner's assistant. When and where it first became the conventional system that a weary or inattentive infant in a class must have its face smoothed downward with a hot hand, or when and where the conventional volunteer boy first beheld such system in operation, and became inflamed with a sacred zeal to administer it, matters not. It was the function of the chief executioner to hold forth, and it was the function of the acolyte to dart at sleeping infants, yawning infants, restless infants, whimpering infants, and smooth their wretched faces; sometimes with one hand, as if he were anointing them for a whisker; sometimes with both hands, applied after the fashion of blinkers. And so the jumble would be in action in this department for a mortal hour; the exponent drawling on to My Dearerr Childerrenerr, let us say, for example, about the beautiful coming to the Sepulchre; and repeating the word Sepulchre (commonly used among infants) five hundred times, and never once hinting what it meant; the conventional boy smoothing away right and left, as an infallible commentary; the whole hot-bed of flushed and exhausted infants exchanging

measles, rashes, whooping-cough, fever, and stomach disorders, as if they were assembled in High Market for the purpose.

Even in this temple of good intentions, an exceptionally sharp boy, exceptionally determined to learn, could learn something, and, having learned it, could impart it much better than the teachers; as being more knowing than they, and not at the disadvantage in which they stood towards the shrewder pupils. In this way it had come about that Charley Hexam had risen in the jumble, taught in the jumble, and been received from the jumble into a better school.

"So you want to go and see your sister, Hexam?"

"If you please, Mr. Headstone."

"I have half a mind to go with you. Where does your sister live?"

"Why, she is not settled yet, Mr. Headstone. I'd rather you did n't see her till she is settled, if it was all the same to you."

"Look here, Hexam," — Mr. Bradley Headstone, highly certified stipendiary schoolmaster, drew his right forefinger through one of the button-holes of the boy's coat, and looked at it attentively — "I hope your sister may be good company for you?"

"Why do you doubt it, Mr. Headstone?"

"I did not say I doubted it."

"No, sir; you did n't say so."

Bradley Headstone looked at his finger again, took it out of the button-hole, and looked at it closer, bit the side of it, and looked at it again.

"You see, Hexam, you will be one of us. In good time you are sure to pass a creditable examination and become one of us. Then the question is —"

The boy waited so long for the question, while the schoolmaster looked at a new side of his finger, and bit it, and looked at it again, that at length the boy repeated: —

"The question is, sir — ?"

"Whether you had not better leave well alone."

"Is it well to leave my sister alone, Mr. Headstone?"

"I do not say so, because I do not know. I put it to you. I ask you to think of it. I want you to consider. You know how well you are doing here."

"After all, she got me here," said the boy, with a struggle.

"Perceiving the necessity of it," acquiesced the schoolmaster, "and making up her mind fully to the separation. Yes."

The boy, with a return of that former reluctance or struggle, or whatever it was, seemed to debate with himself. At length he said, raising his eyes to his master's face: —

"I wish you'd come with me and see her, Mr. Headstone, though she is not settled. I wish you'd come with me, and take her in the rough, and judge her for yourself."

"You are sure you would not like," asked the schoolmaster, "to prepare her?"

"My sister Lizzie," said the boy proudly, "wants no preparing, Mr. Headstone. What she is, she is, and shows herself to be. There's no pretending about my sister."

His confidence in her sat more easily upon him than the indecision with which he had twice contended. It was his better nature to be true to her, if it were his worse nature to be wholly selfish. And as yet the better nature had the stronger hold.

"Well, I can spare the evening," said the schoolmaster. "I am ready to walk with you."

"Thank you, Mr. Headstone. And I am ready to go."

Bradley Headstone, in his decent black coat and waistcoat, and decent white shirt, and decent formal black tie, and decent pantaloons of pepper and salt, with his decent silver watch in his pocket, and its decent hair-guard round his neck, looked a thoroughly decent young man of six-and-twenty. He was never seen in any other dress, and yet there was a certain stiffness in his manner of wearing this, as if there were a want of adaptation between him and it, recalling some mechanics in their holiday clothes. He had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher's knowledge. He could do mental arithmetic mechanically, sing at sight mechanically, blow various wind instruments mechanically, even play the great church organ mechanically. From his early childhood up, his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage. The arrangement of his wholesale warehouse, so that it might be always ready to meet the demands of retail dealers — history here, geography there, astronomy to the right, political economy to the left — natural history, the physical sciences, figures, music, the lower mathematics, and what not, all in their several places — this care had imparted to his countenance a look of care; while the habit of questioning and being questioned had given him a suspicious manner, or a

manner that would be better described as one of lying in wait. There was a kind of settled trouble in the face. It was the face belonging to a naturally slow or inattentive intellect that had toiled hard to get what it had won, and that had to hold it now that it was gotten. He always seemed to be uneasy lest anything should be missing from his mental warehouse, and taking stock to assure himself.

Suppression of so much to make room for so much had given him a constrained manner, over and above. Yet there was enough of what was animal, and of what was fiery (though smouldering), still visible in him, to suggest that if young Bradley Headstone, when a pauper lad, had chanced to be told off for the sea, he would not have been the last man in a ship's crew. Regarding that origin of his, he was proud, moody, and sullen, desiring to be forgotten. And few people knew of it.

In some visits to the Jumble his attention had been attracted to this boy Hexam. An undeniable boy for a pupil teacher; an undeniable boy to do credit to the master who should bring him on. Combined with this consideration, there may have been some thought of the pauper lad now never to be mentioned. Be that how it might, he had with pains gradually worked the boy into his own school, and procured him some offices to discharge there, which were repaid with food and lodging. Such were the circumstances that had brought together Bradley Headstone and young Charley Hexam that autumn evening. Autumn, because full half a year had come and gone since the bird of prey lay dead upon the river shore.

The schools — for they were twofold, as the sexes — were down in that district of the flat country tending to the Thames, where Kent and Surrey meet, and where the railways still bestride the market gardens that will soon die under them. The schools were newly built, and there were so many like them all over the country that one might have thought the whole were but one restless edifice with the locomotive gift of Aladdin's palace. They were in a neighbourhood which looked like a toy neighbourhood taken in blocks out of a box by a child of particularly incoherent mind, and set up anyhow; here, one side of a new street; there, a large solitary public-house facing nowhere; here, another unfinished street already in ruins; there, a church; here, an immense new warehouse; there, a dilapidated old country villa; then, a medley of black

ditch, sparkling cucumber-frame, rank field, richly cultivated kitchen garden, brick viaduct, arch-spanned canal, and disorder of frowziness and fog; as if the child had given the table a kick, and gone to sleep.

But even among school buildings, school teachers, and school pupils, all according to pattern, and all engendered in the light of the latest Gospel according to Monotony, the older pattern into which so many fortunes have been shaped for good and evil comes out. It came out in Miss Peecher the schoolmistress, watering her flowers, as Mr. Bradley Headstone walked forth. It came out in Miss Peecher the schoolmistress, watering the flowers in the little dusty bit of garden attached to her small official residence, with little windows like the eyes in needles, and little doors like the covers of school-books.

Small, shining, neat, methodical, and buxom was Miss Peecher; cherry-cheeked and tuneful of voice. A little pincushion, a little housewife, a little book, a little work-box, a little set of tables and weights and measures, and a little woman, all in one. She could write a little essay on any subject, exactly a slate long, beginning at the left-hand top of one side and ending at the right-hand bottom of the other, and the essay should be strictly according to rule. If Mr. Bradley Headstone had addressed a written proposal of marriage to her, she would probably have replied in a complete little essay on the theme exactly a slate long, but would certainly have replied Yes. For she loved him. The decent hair-guard that went round his neck and took care of his decent silver watch was an object of envy to her. So would Miss Peecher have gone round his neck and taken care of him. Of him, insensible. Because he did not love Miss Peecher.

Miss Peecher's favourite pupil, who assisted her in her little household, was in attendance with a can of water to replenish her little watering-pot, and sufficiently divined the state of Miss Peecher's affections to feel it necessary that she herself should love young Charley Hexam. So there was a double palpitation among the double stocks and double wall-flowers, when the master and the boy looked over the little gate.

"A fine evening, Miss Peecher," said the master.

"A very fine evening, Mr. Headstone," said Miss Peecher. "Are you taking a walk?"

"Hexam and I are going to take a long walk."

"Charming weather," remarked Miss Peecher, "*for* a long walk."

"Ours is rather on business than mere pleasure," said the master.

Miss Peecher inverting her watering-pot, and very carefully shaking out the few last drops over a flower, as if there were some special virtue in them which would make it a Jack's bean-stalk before morning, called for replenishment to her pupil, who had been speaking to the boy.

"Good night, Miss Peecher," said the master.

"Good night, Mr. Headstone," said the mistress.

The pupil had been, in her state of pupilage, so imbued with the class custom of stretching out an arm, as if to hail a cab or omnibus, whenever she found she had an observation on hand to offer to Miss Peecher, that she often did it in their domestic relations; and she did it now.

"Well, Mary Anne?" said Miss Peecher.

"If you please, ma'am, Hexam said they were going to see his sister."

"But that can't be, I think," returned Miss Peecher, "because Mr. Headstone can have no business with *her*."

Mary Anne again hailed.

"Well, Mary Anne?"

"If you please, ma'am, perhaps it 's Hexam's business?"

"That may be," said Miss Peecher. "I did n't think of that. Not that it matters at all."

Mary Anne again hailed.

"Well, Mary Anne?"

"They say she 's very handsome."

"Oh, Mary Anne, Mary Anne!" returned Miss Peecher, slightly colouring and shaking her head, a little out of humour; "how often have I told you not to use that vague expression, not to speak in that general way? When you say *they* say, what do you mean? Part of speech, They?"

Mary Anne hooked her right arm behind her in her left hand, as being under examination, and replied: —

"Personal pronoun."

"Person, They?"

"Third person."

"Number, They?"

"Plural number."

"Then how many do you mean, Mary Anne? Two? Or more?"

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Mary Anne, disconcerted now she came to think of it; "but I don't know that I mean more than her brother himself." As she said it, she unhooked her arm.

"I felt convinced of it," returned Miss Peecher, smiling again. "Now pray, Mary Anne, be careful another time. He says is very different from they say, remember. Difference between he says and they say? Give it me."

Mary Anne immediately hooked her right arm behind her in her left hand, — an attitude absolutely necessary to the situation, — and replied: "One is indicative mood, present tense, third person singular, verb active to say. Other is indicative mood, present tense, third person plural, verb active to say."

"Why verb active, Mary Anne?"

"Because it takes a pronoun after it in the objective case, Miss Peecher."

"Very good indeed," remarked Miss Peecher, with encouragement. "In fact, could not be better. Don't forget to apply it, another time, Mary Anne." This said, Miss Peecher finished the watering of her flowers, and went into her little official residence, and took a refresher of the principal rivers and mountains of the world, their breadths, depths, and heights, before settling the measurements of the body of a dress for their own personal occupation.

Bradley Headstone and Charley Hexam duly got to the Surrey side of Westminster Bridge, and crossed the bridge, and made along the Middlesex shore towards Millbank. In this region are a certain little street, called Church Street, and a certain little blind square, called Smith Square, in the centre of which last retreat is a very hideous church with four towers at the four corners, generally resembling some petrified monster, frightful and gigantic, on its back with its legs in the air. They found a tree near by in a corner, and a blacksmith's forge, and a timber yard, and a dealer's in old iron. What a rusty portion of a boiler and a great iron wheel or so meant by lying half-buried in the dealer's forecourt nobody seemed to know or to want to know. Like the Miller of questionable jollity in the song, They cared for Nobody, no not they, and Nobody cared for them.

After making the round of this place, and noting that there was a deadly kind of repose on it, more as though it had taken laudanum than fallen into a natural rest, they stopped at the point where the street and the square joined, and where there were some little quiet houses in a row. To these Charley Hexam finally led the way, and at one of these stopped.

"This must be where my sister lives, sir. This is where she came for a temporary lodging, soon after father's death."

"How often have you seen her since?"

"Why, only twice, sir," returned the boy, with his former reluctance; "but that's as much her doing as mine."

"How does she support herself?"

"She was always a fair needlewoman, and she keeps the stock-room of a seaman's outfitter."

"Does she ever work at her own lodging here?"

"Sometimes; but her regular hours and regular occupation are at their place of business, I believe, sir. This is the number."

The boy knocked at a door, and the door promptly opened with a spring and a click. A parlour door within a small entry stood open, and disclosed a child — a dwarf — a girl — a something — sitting on a little low, old-fashioned armchair, which had a kind of little working bench before it.

"I can't get up," said the child, "because my back's bad, and my legs are queer. But I'm the person of the house."

"Who else is at home?" asked Charley Hexam, staring.

"Nobody's at home at present," returned the child, with a glib assertion of her dignity, "except the person of the house. What did you want, young man?"

"I wanted to see my sister."

"Many young men have sisters," returned the child. "Give me your name, young man."

The queer little figure and the queer but not ugly little face, with its bright grey eyes, were so sharp, that the sharpness of the manner seemed unavoidable. As if, being turned out of that mould, it must be sharp.

"Hexam is my name."

"Ah, indeed?" said the person of the house. "I thought it might be. Your sister will be in, in about a quarter of an hour. I am very fond of your sister. She's my particular friend. Take a seat. And this gentleman's name?"

"Mr. Headstone, my schoolmaster."

"Take a seat. And would you please to shut the street door first? I can't very well do it myself, because my back's so bad, and my legs are so queer."

They complied in silence, and the little figure went on with its work of gumming or gluing together with a camel's-hair-brush certain pieces of cardboard and thin wood, previously cut into various shapes. The scissors and knives upon the bench showed that the child herself had cut them; and the bright scraps of velvet and silk and ribbon also strewn upon the bench showed that when duly stuffed (and stuffing too was there), she was to cover them smartly. The dexterity of her nimble fingers was remarkable, and as she brought two thin edges accurately together by giving them a little bite, she would glance at the visitors out of the corners of her grey eyes with a look that out-sharpened all her other sharpness.

"You can't tell me the name of my trade, I'll be bound," she said, after taking several of these observations.

"You make pincushions," said Charley.

"What else do I make?"

"Pen-wipers," said Bradley Headstone.

"Ha, ha! What else do I make? You're a schoolmaster, but you can't tell me."

"You do something," he returned, pointing to a corner of the little bench, "with straw; but I don't know what."

"Well done you!" cried the person of the house. "I only make pincushions and pen-wipers, to use up my waste. But my straw really does belong to my business. Try again. What do I make with my straw?"

"Dinner-mats?"

"A schoolmaster, and says dinner-mats! I'll give you a clue to my trade, in a game of forfeits. I love my love with a B because she's Beautiful; I hate my love with a B because she is Brazen; I took her to the sign of the Blue Boar, and I treated her with Bonnets; her name's Bouncer, and she lives in Bedlam. — Now, what do I make with my straw?"

"Ladies' bonnets?"

"Fine ladies'," said the person of the house, nodding assent. "Dolls'. I'm a Dolls' Dressmaker."

"I hope it's a good business?"

The person of the house shrugged her shoulders and shook

her head. "No. Poorly paid. And I 'm often so pressed for time! I had a doll married, last week, and was obliged to work all night. And it 's not good for me, on account of my back being so bad, and my legs so queer."

They looked at the little creature with a wonder that did not diminish, and the schoolmaster said: "I am sorry your fine ladies are so inconsiderate."

"It 's the way with them," said the person of the house, shrugging her shoulders again. "And they take no care of their clothes, and they never keep to the same fashions a month. I work for a doll with three daughters. Bless you, she 's enough to ruin her husband!"

The person of the house gave a weird little laugh here, and gave them another look out of the corners of her eyes. She had an elfin chin that was capable of great expression; and whenever she gave this look, she hitched this chin up. As if her eyes and her chin worked together on the same wires.

"Are you always as busy as you are now?"

"Busier. I 'm slack just now. I finished a large mourning order the day before yesterday. Doll I work for, lost a canary bird." The person of the house gave another little laugh, and then nodded her head several times, as who should moralise, "Oh, this world, this world!"

"Are you alone all day?" asked Bradley Headstone. "Don't any of the neighbouring children —"

"Ah, lud!" cried the person of the house, with a little scream, as if the word had pricked her. "Don't talk of children. I can't bear children. *I* know their tricks and their manners." She said this with an angry little shake of her right fist close before her eyes.

Perhaps it scarcely required the teacher habit to perceive that the dolls' dressmaker was inclined to be bitter on the difference between herself and other children. But both master and pupil understood it so.

"Always running about and screeching, always playing and fighting, always skip-skip-skipping on the pavement and chalking it for their games! Oh! *I* know their tricks and their manners!" Shaking the little fist as before. "And that 's not all. Ever so often calling names in through a person's keyhole, and imitating a person's back and legs. Oh! *I* know their tricks and their manners. And I 'll tell you what I 'd do,

to punish 'em. There 's doors under the church in the Square — black doors, leading into black vaults. Well! I 'd open one of those doors, and I 'd cram 'em all in, and then I 'd lock the door and through the keyhole I 'd blow in pepper."

"What would be the good of blowing in pepper?" asked Charley Hexam.

"To set 'em sneezing," said the person of the house, "and make their eyes water. And when they were all sneezing and inflamed, I 'd mock 'em through the keyhole. Just as they, with their tricks and their manners, mock a person through a person's keyhole!"

An uncommonly emphatic shake of her little fist close before her eyes seemed to ease the mind of the person of the house; for she added with recovered composure, "No, no, no. No children for me. Give me grown-ups."

It was difficult to guess the age of this strange creature, for her poor figure furnished no clue to it, and her face was at once so young and so old. Twelve, or at the most thirteen, might be near the mark.

"I always did like grown-ups," she went on, "and always kept company with them. So sensible. Sit so quiet. Don't go prancing and capering about! And I mean always to keep among none but grown-ups till I marry. I suppose I must make up my mind to marry, one of these days."

She listened to a step outside that caught her ear, and there was a soft knock at the door. Pulling at a handle within her reach, she said, with a pleased laugh: "Now here, for instance, is a grown-up that 's my particular friend!" and Lizzie Hexam in a black dress entered the room.

"Charley! You!"

Taking him to her arms in the old way — of which he seemed a little ashamed — she saw no one else.

"There, there, there, Liz, all right, my dear. See! Here 's Mr. Headstone come with me."

Her eyes met those of the schoolmaster, who had evidently expected to see a very different sort of person, and a murmured word or two of salutation passed between them. She was a little flurried by the unexpected visit, and the schoolmaster was not at his ease. But he never was, quite.

"I told Mr. Headstone you were not settled, Liz, but he was so kind as to take an interest in coming, and so I brought him. How well you look!"

Bradley seemed to think so.

"Ah! Don't she, don't she?" cried the person of the house, resuming her occupation, though the twilight was falling fast. "I believe you she does! But go on with your chat, one and all:

'You one two three,
My com-pa-nie,
And don't mind me,'"

— pointing this impromptu rhyme with three points of her thin forefinger.

"I did n't expect a visit from you, Charley," said his sister. "I supposed that if you wanted to see me you would have sent to me, appointing me to come somewhere near the school, as I did last time. I saw my brother near the school, sir," to Bradley Headstone, "because it 's easier for me to go there, than for him to come here. I work about midway between the two places."

"You don't see much of one another," said Bradley, not improving in respect of ease.

"No." With a rather sad shake of her head. "Charley always does well, Mr. Headstone?"

"He could not do better. I regard his course as quite plain before him."

"I hope so. I am so thankful. So well done of you, Charley dear! It is better for me not to come (except when he wants me) between him and his prospects. You think so, Mr. Headstone?"

Conscious that his pupil teacher was looking for his answer, and that he himself had suggested the boy's keeping aloof from this sister, now seen for the first time face to face, Bradley Headstone stammered: —

"Your brother is very much occupied, you know. He has to work hard. One cannot but say that the less his attention is diverted from his work, the better for his future. When he shall have established himself, why then — it will be another thing then."

Lizzie shook her head again, and returned, with a quiet smile: "I always advised him as you advise him. Did I not, Charley?"

"Well, never mind that now," said the boy. "How are you getting on?"

"Very well, Charley. I want for nothing."

"You have your own room here?"

"Oh, yes. Up stairs. And it 's quiet, and pleasant, and airy."

"And she always has the use of this room for visitors," said the person of the house, screwing up one of her little bony fists, like an opera-glass, and looking through it, with her eyes and her chin in that quaint accordance. "Always this room for visitors; have n't you, Lizzie dear?"

It happened that Bradley Headstone noticed a very slight action of Lizzie Hexam's hand, as though it checked the dolls' dressmaker. And it happened that the latter noticed him the same instant; for she made a double eye-glass of her two hands, looked at him through it, and cried, with a waggish shake of her head: "Aha! Caught you spying, did I?"

It might have fallen out so, anyway; but Bradley Headstone also noticed that immediately after this, Lizzie, who had not taken off her bonnet, rather hurriedly proposed that as the room was getting dark they should go out into the air. They went out; the visitors saying good night to the dolls' dressmaker, whom they left, leaning back in her chair with her arms crossed, singing to herself in a sweet thoughtful little voice.

"I 'll saunter on by the river," said Bradley. "You will be glad to talk together."

As his uneasy figure went on before them among the evening shadows, the boy said to his sister, petulantly: —

"When are you going to settle yourself in some Christian sort of place, Liz? I thought you were going to do it before now."

"I am very well where I am, Charley."

"Very well where you are! I am ashamed to have brought Mr. Headstone with me. How came you to get into such company as that little witch's?"

"By chance at first, as it seemed, Charley. But I think it must have been by something more than chance, for that child — You remember the bills upon the walls at home?"

"Confound the bills upon the walls at home! I want to forget the bills upon the walls at home, and it would be better for you to do the same," grumbled the boy. "Well; what of them?"

"This child is the grandchild of the old man."

"What old man?"

"The terrible drunken old man, in the list slippers and the nightcap."

The boy asked, rubbing his nose in a manner that half expressed vexation at hearing so much, and half curiosity to hear more: "How came you to make that out? What a girl you are!"

"The child's father is employed by the house that employs me; that's how I came to know it, Charley. The father is like his own father, a weak, wretched, trembling creature, falling to pieces, never sober. But a good workman, too, at the work he does. The mother is dead. This poor, ailing, little creature has come to be what she is, surrounded by drunken people from her cradle — if she ever had one, Charley."

"I don't see what you have to do with her, for all that," said the boy.

"Don't you, Charley?"

The boy looked doggedly at the river. They were at Millbank, and the river rolled on their left. His sister gently touched him on the shoulder, and pointed to it.

"Any compensation — restitution — never mind the word, you know my meaning. Father's grave."

But he did not respond with any tenderness. After a moody silence he broke out in an ill-used tone: —

"It'll be a very hard thing, Liz, if, when I am trying my best to get up in the world, you pull me back."

"I, Charley?"

"Yes, you, Liz. Why can't you let bygones be bygones? Why can't you, as Mr. Headstone said to me this very evening about another matter, leave well alone? What we have got to do is, to turn our faces full in our new direction, and keep straight on."

"And never look back? Not even to try to make some amends?"

"You are such a dreamer," said the boy, with his former petulance. "It was all very well when we sat before the fire — when we looked into the hollow down by the flare — but we are looking into the real world now."

"Ah, we were looking into the real world then, Charley!"

"I understand what you mean by that, but you are not justified in it. I don't want, as I raise myself, to shake you off, Liz. I want to carry you up with me. That's what I want to do, and mean to do. I know what I owe you. I said to Mr. Headstone this very evening, 'After all, my sister got

me here.' Well then. Don't pull me back, and hold me down. That 's all I ask, and surely that 's not unconscionable."

She had kept a steadfast look upon him, and she answered with composure: —

"I am not here selfishly, Charley. To please myself, I could not be too far from that river."

"Nor could you be too far from it to please me. Let us get quit of it equally. Why should you linger about it any more than I? I give it a wide berth."

"I can't get away from it, I think," said Lizzie, passing her hand across her forehead. "It 's no purpose of mine that I live by it still."

"There you go, Liz! Dreaming again! You lodge yourself of your own accord in a house with a drunken — tailor, I suppose — or something of the sort, and a little crooked antic of a child, or old person, or whatever it is, and then you talk as if you were drawn or driven there. Now, do be more practical."

She had been practical enough with him, in suffering and striving for him; but she only laid her hand upon his shoulder — not reproachfully — and tapped it twice or thrice. She had been used to do so, to soothe him when she carried him about, a child as heavy as herself. Tears started to his eyes.

"Upon my word, Liz," drawing the back of his hand across them, "I mean to be a good brother to you, and to prove that I know what I owe you. All I say is, that I hope you 'll control your fancies a little, on my account. I 'll get a school, and then you must come and live with me, and you 'll have to control your fancies then, so why not now? Now, say I have n't vexed you."

"You have n't, Charley, you have n't."

"And say I have n't hurt you."

"You have n't, Charley." But this answer was less ready.

"Say you are sure I did n't mean to. Come! There 's Mr. Headstone stopping, and looking over the wall at the tide, to hint that it 's time to go. Kiss me, and tell me that you know I did n't mean to hurt you."

She told him so, and they embraced, and walked on and came up with the schoolmaster.

"But we go your sister's way," he remarked, when the boy told him he was ready. And with his cumbrous and uneasy

action he stiffly offered her his arm. Her hand was just within it, when she drew it back. He looked round with a start, as if he thought she had detected something that repelled her in the momentary touch.

"I will not go in just yet," said Lizzie. "And you have a distance before you, and will walk faster without me."

Being by this time close to Vauxhall Bridge, they resolved, in consequence, to take that way over the Thames, and they left her; Bradley Headstone giving her his hand at parting, and she thanking him for his care of her brother.

The master and the pupil walked on, rapidly and silently. They had nearly crossed the bridge, when a gentleman came coolly sauntering towards them, with a cigar in his mouth, his coat thrown back, and his hands behind him. Something in the careless manner of this person, and in a certain lazily arrogant air with which he approached, holding possession of twice as much pavement as another would have claimed, instantly caught the boy's attention. As the gentleman passed, the boy looked at him narrowly, and then stood still, looking after him.

"Who is it that you stare after?" asked Bradley.

"Why!" said the boy, with a confused and pondering frown upon his face. "It *is* that Wrayburn one!"

Bradley Headstone scrutinised the boy as closely as the boy had scrutinised the gentleman.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Headstone, but I could n't help wondering what in the world brought *him* here!"

Though he said it as if his wonder were past — at the same time resuming the walk — it was not lost upon the master that he looked over his shoulder after speaking, and that the same perplexed and pondering frown was heavy on his face.

"You don't appear to like your friend, Hexam?"

"I DON'T like him," said the boy.

"Why not?"

"He took hold of me by the chin in a precious impertinent way, the first time I ever saw him," said the boy.

"Again, why?"

"For nothing. Or — it 's much the same — because something I happened to say about my sister did n't happen to please him."

"Then he knows your sister?"

"He did n't at that time," said the boy, still moodily pondering.

"Does now?"

The boy had so lost himself that he looked at Mr. Bradley Headstone as they walked on side by side, without attempting to reply until the question had been repeated; then he nodded and answered, "Yes, sir."

"Going to see her, I dare say."

"It can't be!" said the boy quickly. "He does n't know her well enough. I should like to catch him at it!"

When they had walked on for a time, more rapidly than before, the master said, clasping the pupil's arm between the elbow and the shoulder with his hand: —

"You were going to tell me something about that person. What did you say his name was?"

"Wrayburn. Mr. Eugene Wrayburn. He is what they call a barrister, with nothing to do. The first time he came to our old place was when my father was alive. He came on business; not that it was *his* business — *he* never had any business — he was brought by a friend of his."

"And the other times?"

"There was only one other time that I know of. When my father was killed by accident, he chanced to be one of the finders. He was mooning about, I suppose, taking liberties with people's chins; but there he was, somehow. He brought the news home to my sister early in the morning, and brought Miss Abbey Potterson, a neighbour, to help break it to her. He was mooning about the house when I was fetched home in the afternoon — they did n't know where to find me till my sister could be brought round sufficiently to tell them — and then he mooned away."

"And is that all?"

"That 's all, sir."

Bradley Headstone gradually released the boy's arm, as if he were thoughtful, and they walked on side by side as before. After a long silence between them, Bradley resumed the talk.

"I suppose — your sister —" with a curious break both before and after the words, "has received hardly any teaching, Hexam?"

"Hardly any, sir."

"Sacrificed, no doubt, to her father's objections. I remem-

ber them in your case. Yet — your sister — scarcely looks or speaks like an ignorant person."

"Lizzie has as much thought as the best, Mr. Headstone. Too much, perhaps, without teaching. I used to call the fire at home, her books, for she was always full of fancies — sometimes quite wise fancies, considering — when she sat looking at it."

"I don't like that," said Bradley Headstone.

His pupil was a little surprised by this striking in with so sudden and decided and emotional an objection, but took it as a proof of the master's interest in himself. It emboldened him to say: —

"I have never brought myself to mention it openly to you, Mr. Headstone, and you're my witness that I could n't even make up my mind to take it from you before we came out to-night; but it 's a painful thing to think that if I get on as well as you hope, I shall be — I won't say disgraced, because I don't mean disgraced — but — rather put to the blush if it was known — by a sister who has been very good to me."

"Yes," said Bradley Headstone in a slurring way, for his mind scarcely seemed to touch that point, so smoothly did it glide to another, "and there is this possibility to consider. Some man who had worked his way might come to admire — your sister — and might even in time bring himself to think of marrying — your sister — and it would be a sad drawback and a heavy penalty upon him, if, overcoming in his mind other inequalities of condition and other considerations against it, this inequality and this consideration remained in full force."

"That 's much my own meaning, sir."

"Ay, ay," said Bradley Headstone, "but you spoke of a mere brother. Now, the case I have supposed would be a much stronger case; because an admirer, a husband, would form the connection voluntarily, besides being obliged to proclaim it, which a brother is not. After all, you know, it must be said of you that you could n't help yourself; while it would be said of him, with equal reason, that he could."

"That 's true, sir. Sometimes since Lizzie was left free by father's death, I have thought that such a young woman might soon acquire more than enough to pass muster. And sometimes I have even thought that perhaps Miss Peecher — "

"For the purpose, I would advise NOT Miss Peecher," Brad-

ley Headstone struck in, with a recurrence of his late decision of manner.

"Would you be so kind as to think of it for me, Mr. Headstone?"

"Yes, Hexam, yes. I'll think of it. I'll think maturely of it. I'll think well of it."

Their walk was almost a silent one afterwards, until it ended at the schoolhouse. There one of neat Miss Peecher's little windows, like the eyes in needles, was illuminated, and in a corner near it sat Mary Anne watching, while Miss Peecher at the table stitched at the neat little body she was making up by brown paper pattern for her own wearing. (N. B. Miss Peecher and Miss Peecher's pupils were not much encouraged in the unscholastic art of needle-work, by Government.)

Mary Anne, with her face to the window, held her arm up.

"Well, Mary Anne?"

"Mr. Headstone coming home, ma'am."

In about a minute, Mary Anne again hailed.

"Yes, Mary Anne?"

"Gone in and locked his door, ma'am."

Miss Peecher repressed a sigh as she gathered her work together for bed, and transfixed that part of her dress where her heart would have been if she had had the dress on, with a sharp, sharp needle.

CHAPTER II

STILL EDUCATIONAL

THE person of the house, dolls' dressmaker and manufacturer of ornamental pin-cushions and pen-wipers, sat in her quaint little low arm-chair, singing in the dark, until Lizzie came back. The person of the house had attained that dignity while yet of very tender years, indeed, through being the only trustworthy person *in* the house.

"Well, Lizzie-Mizzie-Wizzie," said she, breaking off in her song. "What's the news out of doors?"

"What's the news in doors?" returned Lizzie, playfully smoothing the bright long fair hair which grew very luxuriant and beautiful on the head of the dolls' dressmaker.

"Let me see, said the blind man. Why, the last news is that I don't mean to marry your brother."

"No?"

"No-o," shaking her head and her chin. "Don't like the boy."

"What do you say to his master?"

"I say that I think he's bespoke."

Lizzie finished putting the hair carefully back over the misshapen shoulders, and then lighted a candle. It showed the little parlour to be dingy, but orderly and clean. She stood it on the mantel-shelf, remote from the dressmaker's eyes, and then put the room door open, and the house door open, and turned the little low chair and its occupant towards the outer air. It was a sultry night, and this was a fine-weather arrangement when the day's work was done. To complete it, she seated herself in a chair by the side of the little chair, and protectingly drew under her arm the spare hand that crept up to her.

"This is what your loving Jenny Wren calls the best time in the day and night," said the person of the house. Her real name was Fanny Cleaver; but she had long ago chosen to bestow upon herself the appellation of Miss Jenny Wren.

"I have been thinking," Jenny went on, "as I sat at work to-day, what a thing it would be if I should be abla to have your company till I am married, or at least courted. Because when I am courted, I shall make Him do some of the things that you do for me. He could n't brush my hair like you do, or help me up and down stairs like you do, and he could n't do anything like you do; but he could take my work home, and he could call for orders in his clumsy way. And he shall, too. *I* 'll trot him about, I can tell him!"

Jenny Wren had her personal vanities — happily for her — and no intentions were stronger in her breast than the various trials and torments that were, in the fulness of time, to be inflicted upon "him."

"Wherever he may happen to be just at present, or whoever he may happen to be," said Miss Wren, "I know his tricks and his manners, and I give him warning to look out."

"Don't you think you are rather hard upon him?" asked her friend, smiling, and smoothing her hair.

"Not a bit," replied the sage Miss Wren, with an air of vast experience. "My dear, they don't care for you, those fellows, if you 're *not* hard upon 'em. But I was saying, If I should be able to have your company. Ah! What a large If! Ain't it?"

"I have no intention of parting company, Jenny."

"Don't say that, or you 'll go directly."

"Am I so little to be relied upon?"

"You 're more to be relied upon than silver and gold." As she said it, Miss Wren suddenly broke off, screwed up her eyes and her chin, and looked prodigiously knowing, "Aha! —

"Who comes here?
A Grenadier.
What does he want?
A pot of beer.

And nothing else in the world, my dear."

A man's figure paused on the pavement at the outer door. "Mr. Eugene Wrayburn, ain't it?" said Miss Wren.

"So I am told," was the answer.

"You may come in, if you 're good."

"I am not good," said Eugene, "but I 'll come in."

He gave his hand to Jenny Wren, and he gave his hand to Lizzie, and he stood leaning by the door at Lizzie's side. He had been strolling with his cigar, he said (it was smoked out

and gone by this time), and he had strolled round to return in that direction that he might look in as he passed. Had she not seen her brother to-night?"

"Yes," said Lizzie, whose manner was a little troubled.

Gracious condescension on our brother's part! Mr. Eugene Wrayburn thought he had passed my young gentleman on the bridge yonder. Who was his friend with him?

"The schoolmaster."

"To be sure. Looked like it."

Lizzie sat so still, that one could not have said wherein the fact of her manner being troubled was expressed; and yet one could not have doubted it. Eugene was as easy as ever; but perhaps, as she sat with her eyes cast down, it might have been rather more perceptible that his attention was concentrated upon her for certain moments, than its concentration upon any subject for any short time ever was, elsewhere.

"I have nothing to report, Lizzie," said Eugene. "But having promised you that an eye should be always kept on Mr. Riderhood through my friend Lightwood, I like occasionally to renew my assurance that I keep my promise, and keep my friend up to the mark."

"I should not have doubted it, sir."

"Generally, I confess myself a man to be doubted," returned Eugene coolly, "for all that."

"Why are you?" asked the sharp Miss Wren.

"Because, my dear," said the airy Eugene, "I am a bad idle dog."

"Then why don't you reform and be a good dog?" inquired Miss Wren.

"Because, my dear," returned Eugene, "there's nobody who makes it worth my while. Have you considered my suggestion, Lizzie?" This in a lower voice, but only as if it were a graver matter; not at all to the exclusion of the person of the house.

"I have thought of it, Mr. Wrayburn, but I have not been able to make up my mind to accept it."

"False pride!" said Eugene.

"I think not, Mr. Wrayburn. I hope not."

"False pride!" repeated Eugene. "Why, what else is it? The thing is worth nothing in itself. The thing is worth nothing to me. What can it be worth to me? You know

the most I make of it. I propose to be of some use to somebody — which I never was in this world, and never shall be on any other occasion — by paying some qualified person of your own sex and age, so many (or rather so few) contemptible shillings, to come here, certain nights in the week, and give you certain instruction which you would n't want if you had n't been a self-denying daughter and sister. You know that it 's good to have it, or you would never have so devoted yourself to your brother's having it. Then why not have it: especially when our friend Miss Jenny here would profit by it too? If I proposed to be the teacher, or to attend the lessons — obviously incongruous! — but as to that, I might as well be on the other side of the globe, or not on the globe at all. False pride, Lizzie. Because true pride would n't shame, or be shamed by, your thankless brother. True pride would n't have schoolmasters brought here, like doctors, to look at a bad case. True pride would go to work and do it. You know that, well enough, for you know that your own true pride would do it to-morrow, if you had the ways and means which false pride would n't let me supply. Very well. I add no more than this. Your false pride does wrong to yourself and does wrong to your dead father."

"How to my father, Mr. Wrayburn?" she asked, with an anxious face.

"How to your father? Can you ask! By perpetuating the consequences of his ignorant and blind obstinacy. By resolving not to set right the wrong he did you. By determining that the deprivation to which he condemned you, and which he forced upon you, shall always rest upon his head."

It chanced to be a subtle string to sound, in her who had so spoken to her brother within the hour. It sounded far more forcibly, because of the change in the speaker for the moment; the passing appearance of earnestness, complete conviction, injured resentment of suspicion, generous and unselfish interest. All these qualities, in him usually so light and careless, she felt to be inseparable from some touch of their opposites in her own breast. She thought, had she, so far below him and so different, rejected this disinterestedness, because of some vain misgiving that he sought her out, or heeded any personal attractions that he might descry in her? The poor girl, pure of heart and purpose, could not bear to think it. Sinking before her

own eyes, as she suspected herself of it, she drooped her head as though she had done him some wicked and grievous injury, and broke into silent tears.

"Don't be distressed," said Eugene, very, very kindly. "I hope it is not I who have distressed you. I meant no more than to put the matter in its true light before you; though I acknowledge I did it selfishly enough, for I am disappointed."

Disappointed of doing her a service. How else *could* he be disappointed?

"It won't break my heart," laughed Eugene; "it won't stay by me eight-and-forty hours; but I am genuinely disappointed. I had set my fancy on doing this little thing for you and for our friend Miss Jenny. The novelty of my doing anything in the least useful had its charms. I see now, that I might have managed it better. I might have affected to do it wholly for our friend Miss J. I might have got myself up, morally, as Sir Eugene Bountiful. But upon my soul I can't make flourishes, and I would rather be disappointed than try."

If he meant to follow home what was in Lizzie's thoughts, it was skilfully done. If he followed it by mere fortuitous coincidence, it was done by an evil chance.

"It opened out so naturally before me," said Eugene. "The ball seemed so thrown into my hands by accident! I happen to be originally brought into contact with you, Lizzie, on those two occasions that you know of. I happen to be able to promise you that a watch shall be kept upon that false accuser, Riderhood. I happen to be able to give you some little consolation in the darkest hour of your distress, by assuring you that I don't believe him. On the same occasion I tell you that I am the idlest and least of lawyers, but that I am better than none, in a case I have noted down with my own hand, and that you may be always sure of my best help, and incidentally of Lightwood's too, in your efforts to clear your father. So it gradually takes my fancy that I may help you — so easily! to clear your father of that other blame which I mentioned a few minutes ago, and which is a just and real one. I hope I have explained myself, for I am heartily sorry to have distressed you. I hate to claim to mean well, but I really did mean honestly and simply well, and I want you to know it."

"I have never doubted that, Mr. Wrayburn," said Lizzie, the more repentant, the less he claimed.

"I am very glad to hear it. Though if you had quite understood my whole meaning at first, I think you would not have refused. Do you think you would?"

"I — I don't know that I should, Mr. Wrayburn."

"Well! Then why refuse now you do understand it?"

"It's not easy for me to talk to you," returned Lizzie, in some confusion, "for you see all the consequences of what I say, as soon as I say it."

"Take all the consequences," laughed Eugene, "and take away my disappointment. Lizzie Hexam, as I truly respect you, and as I am your friend and a poor devil of a gentleman, I protest I don't even now understand why you hesitate."

There was an appearance of openness, trustfulness, unsuspecting generosity, in his words and manner, that won the poor girl over; and not only won her over, but again caused her to feel as though she had been influenced by the opposite qualities, with vanity at their head.

"I will not hesitate any longer, Mr. Wrayburn. I hope you will not think the worse of me for having hesitated at all. For myself and for Jenny — you let me answer for you, Jenny dear?"

The little creature had been leaning back, attentive, with her elbows resting on the elbows of her chair, and her chin upon her hands. Without changing her attitude, she answered, "Yes!" so suddenly that it rather seemed as if she had chopped the monosyllable than spoken it.

"For myself and for Jenny, I thankfully accept your kind offer."

"Agreed! Dismissed!" said Eugene, giving Lizzie his hand before lightly waving it, as if he waved the whole subject away. "I hope it may not be often that so much is made of so little!"

Then he fell to talking playfully with Jenny Wren. "I think of setting up a doll, Miss Jenny," he said.

"You had better not," replied the dressmaker.

"Why not?"

"You are sure to break it. All you children do."

"But that makes good for trade, you know, Miss Wren," returned Eugene. "Much as people's breaking promises and contracts and bargains of all sorts makes good for *my* trade."

"I don't know about that," Miss Wren retorted; "but you

had better by half set up a pen-wiper, and turn industrious, and use it."

"Why, if we were all as industrious as you, little Busy-Body, we should begin to work as soon as we could crawl, and there would be a bad thing!"

"Do you mean," returned the little creature, with a flush suffusing her face, "bad for your backs and your legs?"

"No, no, no," said Eugene, shocked — to do him justice — at the thought of trifling with her infirmity. "Bad for business, bad for business. If we all set to work as soon as we could use our hands, it would be all over with the dolls' dress-makers."

"There's something in that," replied Miss Wren; "you have a sort of an idea in your noddle sometimes." Then in a changed tone: "Talking of ideas, my Lizzie," they were sitting side by side as they had sat at first, "I wonder how it happens that when I am work, work, working here, all alone in the summer-time, I smell flowers."

"As a commonplace individual, I should say," Eugene suggested languidly, — for he was growing weary of the person of the house, — "that you smell flowers because you *do* smell flowers."

"No, I don't," said the little creature, resting one arm upon the elbow of her chair, resting her chin upon that hand, and looking vacantly before her; "this is not a flowery neighbourhood. It's anything but that. And yet as I sit at work, I smell miles of flowers. I smell roses, till I think I see the rose-leaves lying in heaps, bushels, on the floor. I smell fallen leaves, till I put down my hand — so — and expect to make them rustle. I smell the white and the pink May in the hedges, and all sorts of flowers that I never was among. For I have seen very few flowers indeed, in my life."

"Pleasant fancies to have, Jenny dear!" said her friend, with a glance towards Eugene, as if she would have asked him whether they were given the child in compensation for her losses.

"So I think, Lizzie, when they come to me. And the birds I hear! Oh!" cried the little creature, holding out her hand and looking upward, "how they sing!"

There was something in the face and action for the moment quite inspired and beautiful. Then the chin dropped musingly upon the hand again.

"I dare say my birds sing better than other birds, and my flowers smell better than other flowers. For when I was a little child," in a tone as though it were ages ago, "the children that I used to see early in the morning were very different from any others that I ever saw. They were not like me; they were not chilled, anxious, ragged, or beaten; they were never in pain. They were not like the children of the neighbours; they never made me tremble all over, by setting up shrill noises, and they never mocked me. Such numbers of them, too! All in white dresses, and with something shining on the borders, and on their heads, that I have never been able to imitate with my work, though I know it so well. They used to come down in long bright slanting rows, and say all together, 'Who is this in pain! Who is this in pain!' When I told them who it was, they answered, 'Come and play with us!' When I said, 'I never play! I can't play!' they swept about me and took me up, and made me light. Then it was all delicious ease and rest till they laid me down, and said, all together, 'Have patience, and we will come again.' Whenever they came back, I used to know they were coming before I saw the long bright rows, by hearing them ask, all together a long way off, 'Who is this in pain! Who is this in pain!' And I used to cry out, 'Oh, my blessed children, it's poor me. Have pity on me. Take me up and make me light!'"

By degrees, as she progressed in this remembrance, the hand was raised, the last ecstatic look returned, and she became quite beautiful. Having so paused for a moment, silent, with a listening smile upon her face, she looked round and recalled herself.

"What poor fun you think me; don't you, Mr. Wrayburn? You may well look tired of me. But it's Saturday night, and I won't detain you."

"That is to say, Miss Wren," observed Eugene, quite ready to profit by the hint, "you wish me to go?"

"Well, it's Saturday night," she returned, "and my child's coming home. And my child is a troublesome bad child, and costs me a world of scolding. I would rather you did n't see my child."

"A doll?" said Eugene, not understanding, and looking for an explanation.

But Lizzie, with her lips only, shaping the two words, "Her

father," he delayed no longer. He took his leave immediately. At the corner of the street he stopped to light another cigar, and possibly to ask himself what he was doing otherwise. If so, the answer was indefinite and vague. Who knows what he is doing, who is careless what he does!

A man stumbled against him as he turned away, who mumbled some maudlin apology. Looking after this man, Eugene saw him go in at the door by which he himself had just come out.

On the man's stumbling into the room, Lizzie rose to leave it.

"Don't go away, Miss Hexam," he said in a submissive manner, speaking thickly and with difficulty. "Don't fly from unfortunate man in shattered state of health. Give poor invalid honour of your company. It ain't — ain't catching."

Lizzie murmured that she had something to do in her own room, and went away up stairs.

"How 's my Jenny?" said the man timidly. "How 's my Jenny Wren, best of children, object dearest affections broken-hearted invalid?"

To which the person of the house, stretching out her arm in an attitude of command, replied with irresponsive asperity: "Go along with you! Go along into your corner! Get into your corner directly!"

The wretched spectacle made as if he would have offered some remonstrance; but not venturing to resist the person of the house, thought better of it, and went and sat down on a particular chair of disgrace.

"Oh-h-h!" cried the person of the house, pointing her little finger. "You bad old boy! O-h-h, you naughty, wicked creature! *What* do you mean by it?"

The shaking figure, unnerved and disjointed from head to foot, put out its two hands a little way, as making overtures of peace and reconciliation. Abject tears stood in its eyes, and stained the blotched red of its cheeks. The swollen lead coloured under lip trembled with a shameful whine. The whole indecorous threadbare ruin, from the broken shoes to the prematurely grey scanty hair, grovelled. Not with any sense, worthy to be called a sense, of this dire reversal of the places of parent and child, but in a pitiful expostulation to be let off from a scolding.

"*I* know your tricks and your manners," cried Miss Wren. "*I* know where you've been to!" (which indeed it did not require discernment to discover.) "Oh, you disgraceful old chap!"

The very breathing of the figure was contemptible, as it laboured and rattled in that operation, like a blundering clock.

"Slave, slave, slave, from morning to night," pursued the person of the house, "and all for this! *What* do you mean by it?"

There was something in that emphasized "What," which absurdly frightened the figure. As often as the person of the house worked her way round to it — even as soon as he saw that it was coming — he collapsed in an extra degree.

"I wish you had been taken up, and locked up," said the person of the house. "I wish you had been poked into cells and black holes, and run over by rats and spiders and beetles. *I* know their tricks and their manners, and they'd have tickled you nicely. Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Yes, my dear," stammered the father.

"Then," said the person of the house, terrifying him by a grand muster of her spirits and forces before recurring to the emphatic word, "*what* do you mean by it?"

"Circumstances over which had no control," was the miserable creature's plea in extenuation.

"*I*'ll circumstance you and control you, too," retorted the person of the house, speaking with vehement sharpness, "if you talk in that way. I'll give you in charge to the police, and have you fined five shillings when you can't pay, and then I won't pay the money for you, and you'll be transported for life. How should you like to be transported for life?"

"Should n't like it. Poor shattered invalid. Trouble nobody long," cried the wretched figure.

"Come, come!" said the person of the house, tapping the table near her in a business-like manner, and shaking her head and her chin; "you know what you've got to do. Put down your money this instant."

The obedient figure began to rummage in its pockets.

"Spent a fortune out of your wages, I'll be bound!" said the person of the house. "Put it here! All you've got left! Every farthing!"

Such a business as he made of collecting it from his dogs'-eared pockets; of expecting it in this pocket, and not finding it; of not expecting it in that pocket, and passing it over; of finding no pocket where that other pocket ought to be!

"Is this all?" demanded the person of the house, when a confused heap of pence and shillings lay on the table.

"Got no more," was the rueful answer, with an accordant shake of the head.

"Let me make sure. You know what you've got to do. Turn all your pockets inside out, and leave 'em so!" cried the person of the house.

He obeyed. And if anything could have made him look more abject or more dismally ridiculous than before, it would have been his so displaying himself.

"Here's but seven and eightpence halfpenny!" exclaimed Miss Wren, after reducing the heap to order. "Oh, you prodigal old son! Now you shall be starved."

"No, don't starve me," he urged, whimpering.

"If you were treated as you ought to be," said Miss Wren, "you'd be fed upon the skewers of cats' meat; — only the skewers, after the cats had had the meat. As it is, go to bed."

When he stumbled out of the corner to comply, he again put out both his hands, and pleaded: "Circumstances over which no control —"

"Get along with you to bed!" cried Miss Wren, snapping him up. "Don't speak to me. I'm not going to forgive you. Go to bed this moment!"

Seeing another emphatic "What" upon its way, he evaded it by complying, and was heard to shuffle heavily up stairs, and shut his door, and throw himself on his bed. Within a little while afterwards, Lizzie came down.

"Shall we have our supper, Jenny dear?"

"Ah! bless us and save us, we need have something to keep us going," returned Miss Jenny, shrugging her shoulders.

Lizzie laid a cloth upon the little bench (more handy for the person of the house than an ordinary table), and put upon it such plain fare as they were accustomed to have, and drew up a stool for herself.

"Now for supper! What are you thinking of, Jenny darling?"

"I was thinking," she returned, coming out of a deep study, "what I would do to Him, if he should turn out a drunkard."

"Oh, but he won't," said Lizzie. "You 'll take care of that, beforehand."

"I shall try to take care of it beforehand, but he might deceive me. Oh, my dear, all those fellows with their tricks and their manners do deceive!" With the little fist in full action. "And if so, I tell you what I think I'd do. When he was asleep, I'd make a spoon red hot, and I'd have some boiling liquor bubbling in a saucepan, and I'd take it out hissing, and I'd open his mouth with the other hand, — or perhaps he'd sleep with his mouth ready open, — and I'd pour it down his throat, and blister it and choke him."

"I am sure you would do no such horrible thing," said Lizzie.

"Should n't I? Well; perhaps I should n't. But I should like to!"

"I am equally sure you would not."

"Not even like to? Well, you generally know best. Only you have n't always lived among it as I have lived — and your back is n't bad, and your legs are not queer."

As they went on with their supper, Lizzie tried to bring her round to that prettier and better state. But the charm was broken. The person of the house was the person of a house full of sordid shames and cares, with an upper room in which that abased figure was infecting even innocent sleep with sensual brutality and degradation. The dolls' dressmaker had become a little quaint shrew; of the world, worldly; of the earth, earthy.

Poor dolls' dressmaker! How often so dragged down by hands that should have raised her up; how often so misdirected when losing her way on the eternal road, and asking guidance! Poor, poor little dolls' dressmaker!

CHAPTER III

A PIECE OF WORK

BRITANNIA, sitting meditating one fine day (perhaps in the attitude in which she is presented on the copper coinage), discovers all of a sudden that she wants Veneering in Parliament. It occurs to her that Veneering is "a representative man," — which cannot in these times be doubted, — and that Her Majesty's faithful Commons are incomplete without him. So Britannia mentions to a legal gentleman of her acquaintance that if Veneering will "put down" five thousand pounds, he may write a couple of initial letters after his name at the extremely cheap rate of two thousand five hundred per letter. It is clearly understood between Britannia and the legal gentleman that nobody is to take up the five thousand pounds, but that being put down they will disappear by magic conjuration and enchantment.

The legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence going straight from that lady to Veneering, thus commissioned, Veneering declares himself highly flattered, but requires breathing time to ascertain "whether his friends will rally round him." Above all things, he says, it behoves him to be clear, at a crisis of this importance, "whether his friends will rally round him." The legal gentleman, in the interests of his client, cannot allow much time for this purpose, as the lady rather thinks she knows somebody prepared to put down six thousand pounds; but he says he will give Veneering four hours.

Veneering then says to Mrs. Veneering, "We must work," and throws himself into a hansom cab. Mrs. Veneering in the same moment relinquishes baby to Nurse; presses her aquiline hands upon her brow, to arrange the throbbing intellect within; orders out the carriage; and repeats in a distracted and devoted manner, compounded of Ophelia and any self-immolating female of antiquity you may prefer, "We must work."

Veneering having instructed his driver to charge at the Public in the streets, like the Life-Guards at Waterloo, is driven

furiously to Duke Street, St. James's. There he finds Twemlow in his lodgings, fresh from the hands of a secret artist who has been doing something to his hair with yolks of eggs. The process requiring that Twemlow shall, for two hours after the application, allow his hair to stick upright and dry gradually, he is in an appropriate state for the receipt of startling intelligence; looking equally like the Monument on Fish Street Hill, and King Priam on a certain incendiary occasion not wholly unknown as a neat point from the classics.

"My dear Twemlow," says Veneering, grasping both his hands, "as the dearest and oldest of my friends —"

("Then there can be no more doubt about it in future," thinks Twemlow, "and I AM!")

"— Are you of opinion that your cousin, Lord Snigsworth, would give his name as a Member of my Committee? I don't go so far as to ask for his lordship; I only ask for his name. Do you think he would give me his name?"

In sudden low spirits, Twemlow replies, "I don't think he would."

"My political opinions," says Veneering, not previously aware of having any, "are identical with those of Lord Snigsworth, and perhaps as a matter of public feeling and public principle, Lord Snigsworth would give me his name."

"It might be so," says Twemlow; "but" — And perplexedly scratching his head, forgetful of the yolks of eggs, is the more discomfited by being reminded how sticky he is.

"Between such old and intimate friends as ourselves," pursues Veneering, "there should in such a case be no reserve. Promise me that if I ask you to do anything for me which you don't like to do, or feel the slightest difficulty in doing, you will freely tell me so."

This, Twemlow is so kind as to promise, with every appearance of most heartily intending to keep his word.

"Would you have any objection to write down to Snigsworthy Park, and ask this favour of Lord Snigsworth? Of course if it were granted I should know that I owed it solely to you; while at the same time you would put it to Lord Snigsworth entirely upon public grounds. Would you have any objection?"

Says Twemlow, with his hand to his forehead, "You have exacted a promise from me."

"I have, my dear Twemlow."

"And you expect me to keep it honourably."

"I do, my dear Twemlow."

"*On* the whole, then — observe me," urges Twemlow with great nicety, as if, in the case of its having been off the whole, he would have done it directly, — "*on* the whole, I must beg you to excuse me from addressing any communication to Lord Snigsworth."

"Bless you, bless you!" says Veneering, horribly disappointed, but grasping him by both hands again, in a particularly fervent manner.

It is not to be wondered at that poor Twemlow should decline to inflict a letter on his noble cousin (who has gout in the temper), inasmuch as his noble cousin, who allows him a small annuity on which he lives, takes it out of him, as the phrase goes, in extreme severity; putting him, when he visits at Snigsworthy Park, under a kind of martial law; ordaining that he shall hang his hat on a particular peg, sit on a particular chair, talk on particular subjects to particular people, and perform particular exercises; such as sounding the praises of the Family Varnish (not to say Pictures), and abstaining from the choicest of the Family Wines unless expressly invited to partake.

"One thing, however, I *can* do for you," says Twemlow; "and that is, work for you."

Veneering blesses him again.

"I 'll go," says Twemlow, in a rising hurry of spirits, "to the club; — let us see now; what o'clock is it?"

"Twenty minutes to eleven."

"I 'll be," says Twemlow, "at the club by ten minutes to twelve, and I 'll never leave it all day."

Veneering feels that his friends are rallying round him, and says, "Thank you, thank you. I knew I could rely upon you. I said to Anastatia before leaving home just now to come to you — of course the first friend I have seen on a subject so momentous to me, my dear Twemlow — I said to Anastatia, 'We must work.'"

"You were right, you were right," replies Twemlow. "Tell me. Is *she* working?"

"She is," says Veneering.

"Good!" cries Twemlow, polite little gentleman that he is.

"A woman's tact is invaluable. To have the dear sex with us is to have everything with us."

"But you have not imparted to me," remarks Veneering, "what you think of my entering the House of Commons?"

"I think," rejoins Twemlow feelingly, "that it is the best club in London."

Veneering again blesses him, plunges down stairs, rushes into his hansom, and directs the driver to be up and at the British public, and to charge into the City.

Meanwhile Twemlow, in an increasing hurry of spirits, gets his hair down as well as he can, — which is not very well; for after these glutinous applications it is restive, and has a surface on it somewhat in the nature of pastry, — and gets to the club by the appointed time. At the club he promptly secures a large window, writing materials, and all the newspapers, and establishes himself, immovable, to be respectfully contemplated by Pall Mall. Sometimes, when a man enters who nods to him, Twemlow says, "Do you know Veneering?" Man says, "No; member of the club?" Twemlow says, "Yes. Coming in for Pocket-Breeches." Man says, "Ah! Hope he may find it worth the money!" yawns, and saunters out. Towards six o'clock of the afternoon Twemlow begins to persuade himself that he is positively jaded with work, and thinks it much to be regretted that he was not brought up as a parliamentary agent.

From Twemlow's, Veneering dashes at Podsnap's place of business. Finds Podsnap reading the paper, standing, and inclined to be oratorical over the astonishing discovery he has made, that Italy is not England. Respectfully entreats Podsnap's pardon for stopping the flow of his words of wisdom, and informs him what is in the wind. Tells Podsnap that their political opinions are identical. Gives Podsnap to understand that he, Veneering, formed his political opinions while sitting at the feet of him, Podsnap. Seeks earnestly to know whether Podsnap "will rally round him?"

Says Podsnap, something sternly: "Now, first of all, Veneering, do you ask my advice?"

Veneering falters that as so old and so dear a friend —

"Yes, yes, that 's all very well," says Podsnap; "but have you made up your mind to take this borough of Pocket-Breeches on its own terms, or do you ask my opinion whether you shall take it or leave it alone?"

Veneering repeats that his heart's desire and his soul's thirst are, that Podsnap shall rally round him.

"Now, I 'll be plain with you, Veneering," says Podsnap, knitting his brows. "You will infer that *I* don't care about Parliament, from the fact of my not being there?"

Why, of course Veneering knows that! Of course Veneering knows that if Podsnap chose to go there, he would be there, in a space of time that might be stated by the light and thoughtless as a jiffy.

"It is not worth my while," pursues Podsnap, becoming handsomely mollified, "and it is the reverse of important to my position. But it is not my wish to set myself up as law for another man, differently situated. You think it *is* worth *your* while, and *is* important to *your* position. Is that so?"

Always with the proviso that Podsnap will rally round him, Veneering thinks it is so.

"Then you don't ask my advice," says Podsnap. "Good. Then I won't give it you. But you do ask my help. Good. Then I 'll work for you."

Veneering instantly blesses him, and apprises him that Twemlow is already working. Podsnap does not quite approve that anybody should be already working, — regarding it rather in the light of a liberty, — but tolerates Twemlow, and says he is a well-connected old female who will do no harm.

"I have nothing very particular to do to-day," adds Podsnap, "and I 'll mix with some influential people. I had engaged myself to dinner, but I 'll send Mrs. Podsnap and get off going myself, and I 'll dine with you at eight. It 's important we should report progress and compare notes. Now, let me see. You ought to have a couple of active energetic fellows, of gentlemanly manners, to go about."

Veneering, after cogitation, thinks of Boots and Brewer.

"Whom I have met at your house," says Podsnap. "Yes. They 'll do very well. Let them each have a cab, and go about."

Veneering immediately mentions what a blessing he feels it, to possess a friend capable of such grand administrative suggestions, and really is elated at this going about of Boots and Brewer, as an idea wearing an electioneering aspect and looking desperately like business. Leaving Podsnap, at a hand-gallop, he descends upon Boots and Brewer, who enthusiastically rally round him by at once bolting off in cabs, taking opposite direc-

tions. Then Veneering repairs to the legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence, and with him transacts some delicate affairs of business, and issues an address to the independent electors, of Pocket-Breeches, announcing that he is coming among them for their suffrages, as the mariner returns to the home of his early childhood: a phrase which is none the worse for his never having been near the place in his life, and not even now distinctly knowing where it is.

Mrs. Veneering, during the same eventful hours, is not idle. No sooner does the carriage turn out, all complete, than she turns into it, all complete, and gives the word "To Lady Tippins's." That charmer dwells over a staymaker's in the Belgravian Borders, with a life-size model, in the window on the ground-floor, of a distinguished beauty in a blue petticoat, stay-lace in hand, looking over her shoulder at the town in innocent surprise. As well she may, to find herself dressing under the circumstances.

"Lady Tippins at home? Lady Tippins at home, with the room darkened, and her back (like the lady's at the ground-floor window, though for a different reason) cunningly turned towards the light. Lady Tippins is so surprised by seeing her dear Mrs. Veneering so early — in the middle of the night the pretty creature calls it — that her eyelids almost go up, under the influence of that emotion.

To whom Mrs. Veneering incoherently communicates, how that Veneering has been offered Pocket-Breeches; how that it is the time for rallying round; how that Veneering has said, "We must work; how that she is here, as a wife and mother, to entreat Lady Tippins to work; how that the carriage is at Lady Tippins's disposal for purpose of work; how that she, proprietress of said bran-new elegant equipage, will return home on foot — on bleeding feet if need be — to work (not specifying how) until she drops by the side of baby's crib.

"My love," says Lady Tippins, "compose yourself; we 'll bring him in." And Lady Tippins really does work, and work the Veneering horses, too; for she clatters about town all day, calling upon everybody she knows, and showing her entertaining powers and green fan to immense advantage, by rattling on with, My dear soul, what do you think? What do you suppose me to be? You 'll never guess. I 'm pretending to be an electioneering agent. And for what place of all places?

Pocket-Breeches. And why? Because the dearest friend I have in the world has bought it. And who is the dearest friend I have in the world? A man of the name of Veneering. Not omitting his wife, who is the other dearest friend I have in the world; and I positively declare I forgot their baby, who is the other. And we are carrying on this little farce to keep up appearances, and is n't it refreshing! Then, my precious child, the fun of it is that nobody knows who these Veneerings are, and that they know nobody, and that they have a house out of the Tales of the Genii, and give dinners out of the Arabian Nights. Curious to see 'em, my dear? Say you 'll know 'em. Come and dine with 'em. They shan't bore you. Say who shall meet you. We 'll make up a party of our own, and I 'll engage that they shall not interfere with you for one single moment. You really ought to see their gold and silver camels. I call their dinner-table the Caravan. Do come and dine with my Veneerings, my own Veneerings, my exclusive property, the dearest friends I have in the world! And above all, my dear, be sure you promise me your vote and interest and all sorts of plumpers for Pocket-Breeches; for we could n't think of spending sixpence on it, my love, and can only consent to be brought in by the spontaneous thingummies of the incorruptible whatdoyoucallums.

Now, the point of view seized by the bewitching Tippins, that this same working and rallying round is to keep up appearances, may have something in it, but not all the truth. More is done, or considered to be done — which does as well — by taking cabs, and "going about," than the fair Tippins knew of. Many vast vague reputations have been made, solely by taking cabs and going about. This particularly obtains in all Parliamentary affairs. Whether the business in hand is to get a man in, or get a man out, or get a man over, or promote a railway, or jockey a railway, or what else, nothing is understood to be so effectual as scouring nowhere in a violent hurry — in short, as taking cabs and going about.

Probably because this reason is in the air, Twemlow, far from being singular in his persuasion that he works like a Trojan, is capped by Podsnap, who in his turn is capped by Boots and Brewer. At eight o'clock, when all these hard workers assemble to dine at Veneering's, it is understood that Boots and Brewer must n't leave the door, but that pails of water must be brought

from the nearest baiting-place, and cast over the horses' legs on the very spot, lest Boots and Brewer should have instant occasion to mount and away. Those fleet messengers require the Analytical to see that their hats are deposited where they can be laid hold of at an instant's notice; and they dine (remarkably well though) with the air of firemen in charge of an engine, expecting intelligence of some tremendous conflagration.

Mrs. Veneering faintly remarks, as dinner opens, that many such days would be too much for her.

"Many such days would be too much for all of us," says Podsnap; "but we 'll bring him in!"

"We 'll bring him in," says Lady Tippins, sportively waving her green fan. "Veneering for ever!"

"We 'll bring him in!" says Twemlow.

"We 'll bring him in!" says Boots and Brewer.

Strictly speaking, it would be hard to show cause why they should not bring him in, Pocket-Breeches having closed its little bargain, and there being no opposition. However, it is agreed that they must "work" to the last, and that if they did not work something indefinite would happen. It is likewise agreed that they are all so exhausted with the work behind them, and need to be so fortified for the work before them, as to require peculiar strengthening from Veneering's cellar. Therefore, the Analytical has orders to produce the cream of the cream of his binns, and therefore it falls out that rallying becomes rather a trying word for the occasion; Lady Tippins being observed gamely to inculcate the necessity of rearing round their dear Veneering; Podsnap advocating roaring round him; Boots and Brewer declaring their intention of reeling round him; and Veneering thanking his devoted friends one and all, with great emotion, for rarullarulling round him.

In these inspiring moments, Brewer strikes out an idea which is the great hit of the day. He consults his watch, and says (like Guy Fawkes) he 'll go down to the House of Commons and see how things look.

"I 'll keep about the lobby for an hour or so," says Brewer, with a deeply mysterious countenance, "and if things look well, I won't come back, but will order my cab for nine in the morning."

"You could n't do better," says Podsnap.

Veneering expresses his inability ever to acknowledge this

last service. Tears stand in Mrs. Veneering's affectionate eyes. Boots shows envy, loses ground, and is regarded as possessing a second-rate mind. They all crowd to the door, to see Brewer off. Brewer says to his driver, "Now, is your horse pretty fresh?" eyeing the animal with critical scrutiny. Driver says he's as fresh as butter. "Put him along then," says Brewer; "House of Commons." Driver darts up, Brewer leaps in, they cheer him as he departs, and Mr. Podsnap says, "Mark my words, sir. That's a man of resource; that's a man to make his way in life."

When the time comes for Veneering to deliver a neat and appropriate stammer to the men of Pocket-Breeches, only Podsnap and Twemlow accompany him by railway to that sequestered spot. The legal gentleman is at the Pocket-Breeches Branch Station, with an open carriage with a printed bill "Veneering for ever" stuck upon it, as if it were a wall; and they gloriously proceed, amidst the grins of the populace, to a feeble little town hall on crutches, with some onions and bootlaces under it, which the legal gentleman says are a Market; and from the front window of that edifice Veneering speaks to the listening earth. In the moment of his taking his hat off, Podsnap, as per agreement made with Mrs. Veneering, telegraphs to that wife and mother, "He's up."

Veneering loses his way in the usual No Thoroughfares of speech, and Podsnap and Twemlow say, Hear, Hear! and sometimes, when he can't by any means back himself out of some very unlucky No Thoroughfare, "He-a-a-r, He-a-a-r!" with an air of facetious conviction, as if the ingenuity of the thing gave them a sensation of exquisite pleasure. But Veneering makes two remarkably good points; so good that they are supposed to have been suggested to him by the legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence, while briefly conferring on the stairs.

Point the first is this. Veneering institutes an original comparison between the country and a ship; pointedly calling the ship the Vessel of the State, and the Minister the Man at the Helm. Veneering's object is to let Pocket-Breeches know that his friend on his right (Podsnap) is a man of wealth. Consequently says he, "And, gentlemen, when the timbers of the Vessel of the State are unsound and the Man at the Helm is unskilful, would those great Marine Insurers, who rank among our world-famed merchant-princes — would they insure her,

gentlemen? Would they underwrite her? Would they incur a risk in her? Would they have confidence in her? Why, gentlemen, if I appealed to my honourable friend upon my right, himself among the greatest and most respected of that great and much respected class, he would answer No!"

Point the second is this. The telling fact that Twemlow is related to Lord Snigsworth must be let off. Veneering supposes a state of public affairs that probably never could by any possibility exist (though this is not quite certain, in consequence of his picture being unintelligible to himself and everybody else), and thus proceeds. "Why, gentlemen, if I were to indicate such a programme to any class of society, I say it would be received with derision, would be pointed at by the finger of scorn. If I indicated such a programme to any worthy and intelligent tradesman of your town — nay, I will here be personal, and say Our town — what would he reply? He would reply, 'Away with it!' That's what *he* would reply, gentlemen. In his honest indignation he would reply, 'Away with it!' But suppose I mounted higher in the social scale. Suppose I drew my arm through the arm of my respected friend upon my left, and, walking with him through the ancestral woods of his family and under the spreading beeches of Snigsworthy Park, approached the noble hall, crossed the courtyard, entered by the door, went up the staircase, and, passing from room to room, found myself at last in the august presence of my friend's near kinsman, Lord Snigsworth. And suppose I said to that venerable earl, 'My Lord, I am here before your lordship, presented by your lordship's near kinsman, my friend upon my left, to indicate that programme;' what would his lordship answer? Why, he would answer, 'Away with it!' That's what he would answer, gentlemen. 'Away with it!' Onconsciously using, in his exalted sphere, the exact language of the worthy and intelligent tradesman of our town, the near and dear kinsman of my friend upon my left would answer in his wrath, 'Away with it!'"

Veneering finishes with this last success, and Mr. Podsnap telegraphs to Mrs. Veneering, "He 's down."

Then dinner is had at the hotel with the legal gentleman, and then there are in due succession nomination and declaration. Finally Mr. Podsnap telegraphs to Mrs. Veneering, "We have brought him in."

Another gorgeous dinner awaits them on their return to the Veneering halls, and Lady Tippins awaits them, and Boots and Brewer await them. There is a modest assertion on everybody's part that everybody single-handed "brought him in;" but in the main it is conceded by all that that stroke of business on Brewer's part, in going down to the House that night to see how things looked, was the master-stroke.

A touching little incident is related by Mrs. Veneering, in the course of the evening. Mrs. Veneering is habitually disposed to be tearful, and has an extra disposition that way after her late excitement. Previous to withdrawing from the dinner-table with Lady Tippins, she says, in a pathetic and physically weak manner: —

"You will all think it foolish of me, I know, but I must mention it. As I sat by Baby's crib, on the night before the election, Baby was very uneasy in her sleep."

The Analytical chemist, who is gloomily looking on, has diabolical impulses to suggest "Wind," and throw up his situation; but represses them.

"After an interval almost convulsive, Baby curled her little hands in one another and smiled."

Mrs. Veneering stopping here, Mr. Podsnap deems it incumbent on him to say: "I wonder why!"

"Could it be, I asked myself," says Mrs. Veneering, looking about her for her pocket-handkerchief, "that the Fairies were telling Baby that her papa would shortly be an M. P.?"

So overcome by the sentiment is Mrs. Veneering that they all get up to make a clear stage for Veneering, who goes round the table to the rescue, and bears her out backward, with her feet impressively scraping the carpet, after remarking that her work has been too much for her strength. Whether the fairies made any mention of the five thousand pounds, and it disagreed with Baby, is not speculated upon.

Poor little Twemlow, quite done up, is touched, and still continues touched after he is safely housed over the livery-stable yard in Duke Street, St. James's. But there, upon his sofa, a tremendous consideration breaks in upon the mild gentleman, putting all softer considerations to the rout.

"Gracious heavens! Now I have time to think of it, he never saw one of his constituents in all his days, until we saw them together!"

After having paced the room in distress of mind, with his hand to his forehead, the innocent Twemlow returns to his sofa and moans: —

"I shall either go distracted, or die, of this man. He comes upon me too late in life. I am not strong enough to bear him!"

CHAPTER IV

CUPID PROMPTED

To use the cold language of the world, Mrs. Alfred Lammle rapidly improved the acquaintance of Miss Podsnap. To use the warm language of Mrs. Lammle, she and her sweet Georgiana soon became one: in heart, in mind, in sentiment, in soul.

Whenever Georgiana could escape from the thraldom of Podsnappery; could throw off the bedclothes of the custard-coloured phaeton, and get up; could shrink out of the range of her mother's rocking, and (so to speak) rescue her poor little frosty toes from being rocked over, she repaired to her friend, Mrs. Alfred Lammle. Mrs. Podsnap by no means objected. As a conscientiously "splendid woman," accustomed to overhear herself so denominated by elderly osteologists pursuing their studies in dinner society, Mrs. Podsnap could dispense with her daughter. Mr. Podsnap, for his part, on being informed where Georgiana was, swelled with patronage of the Lammles. That they, when unable to lay hold of him, should respectfully grasp at the hem of his mantle; that they, when they could not bask in the glory of him the sun, should take up with the pale reflected light of the watery young moon his daughter, appeared quite natural, becoming, and proper. It gave him a better opinion of the discretion of the Lammles than he had heretofore held, as showing that they appreciated the value of the connection. So Georgiana repairing to her friend, Mr. Podsnap went out to dinner, and to dinner, and yet to dinner, arm in arm with Mrs. Podsnap, settling his obstinate head in his cravat and shirt-collar, much as if he were performing on the Pandean pipes, in his own honour, the triumphal march, See the conquering Podsnap comes, Sound the trumpets, beat the drums!

It was a trait in Mr. Podsnap's character (and in one form or other it will be generally seen to pervade the depths and shallows of Podsnappery) that he could not endure a hint of disparagement of any friend or acquaintance of his. "How dare

you ?" he would seem to say, in such a case. "What do you mean ? I have licensed this person. This person has taken out *my* certificate. Through this person you strike at me, Podsnap the Great. And it is not that I particularly care for the person's dignity, but that I do most particularly care for Podsnap's." Hence, if any one in his presence had presumed to doubt the responsibility of the Lammles, he would have been mightily huffed. Not that any one did, for Veneering, M. P., was always the authority for their being very rich, and perhaps believed it. As indeed he might, if he chose, for anything he knew of the matter.

Mr. and Mrs. Lammle's house in Sackville Street, Piccadilly, was but a temporary residence. It had done well enough, they informed their friends, for Mr. Lammle when a bachelor, but it would not do now. So they were always looking at palatial residences in the best situations, and always very nearly taking or buying one, but never quite concluding the bargain. Hereby they made for themselves a shining little reputation apart. People said, on seeing a vacant palatial residence, "The very thing for the Lammles!" and wrote to the Lammles about it, and the Lammles always went to look at it, but unfortunately it never exactly answered. In short, they suffered so many disappointments that they began to think it would be necessary to build a palatial residence. And hereby they made another shining reputation ; many persons of their acquaintance becoming by anticipation dissatisfied with their own houses, and envious of the non-existent Lammle structure.

The handsome fittings and furnishings of the house in Sackville Street were piled thick and high over the skeleton up stairs, and if it ever whispered from under its load of upholstery, "Here I am in the closet!" it was to very few ears, and certainly never to Miss Podsnap's. What Miss Podsnap was particularly charmed with, next to the graces of her friend, was the happiness of her friend's married life. This was frequently their theme of conversation.

"I am sure," said Miss Podsnap, "Mr. Lammle is like a lover. At least I — I should think he was."

"Georgiana, darling!" said Mrs. Lammle, holding up a forefinger, "take care!"

"Oh my goodness me!" exclaimed Miss Podsnap, reddening. "What have I said now ?"

"Alfred, you know," hinted Mrs. Lammle, playfully shaking her head. "You were never to say Mr. Lammle any more, Georgiana."

"Oh! Alfred, then. I am glad it's no worse. I was afraid I had said something shocking. I am always saying something wrong to ma."

"To me, Georgiana dearest?"

"No, not to you; you are not ma. I wish you were."

Mrs. Lammle bestowed a sweet and loving smile upon her friend, which Miss Podsnap returned as she best could. They sat at lunch in Mrs. Lammle's own boudoir.

"And so, dearest Georgiana, Alfred is like your notion of a lover?"

"I don't say that, Sophronia," Georgiana replied, beginning to conceal her elbows. "I have n't any notion of a lover. The dreadful wretches that ma brings up at places to torment me are not lovers. I only mean that Mr. —"

"Again, dearest Georgiana?"

"That Alfred —"

"Sounds much better, darling."

"— Loves you so. He always treats you with such delicate gallantry and attention. Now, don't he?"

"Truly, my dear," said Mrs. Lammle, with a rather singular expression crossing her face. "I believe that he loves me fully as much as I love him."

"Oh, what happiness!" exclaimed Miss Podsnap.

"But do you know, my Georgiana," Mrs. Lammle resumed presently, "that there is something suspicious in your enthusiastic sympathy with Alfred's tenderness?"

"Good gracious no, I hope not!"

"Does n't it rather suggest," said Mrs. Lammle archly, "that my Georgiana's little heart is —"

"Oh, don't!" Miss Podsnap blushingly besought her. "Please don't! I assure you, Sophronia, that I only praise Alfred, because he is your husband and so fond of you."

Sophronia's glance was as if a rather new light broke in upon her. It shaded off into a cool smile, as she said, with her eyes upon her lunch, and her eyebrows raised: —

"You are quite wrong, my love, in your guess at my meaning. What I insinuated was, that my Georgiana's little heart was growing conscious of a vacancy."

"No, no, no," said Georgiana. "I would n't have anybody say anything to me in that way for I don't know how many thousand pounds."

"In what way, my Georgiana?" inquired Mrs. Lammle, still smiling coolly with her eyes upon her lunch, and her eyebrows raised.

"*You* know," returned poor little Miss Podsnap. "I think I should go out of my mind, Sophronia, with vexation and shyness and detestation, if anybody did. It 's enough for me to see how loving you and your husband are. That 's a different thing. I could n't bear to have anything of that sort going on with myself. I should beg and pray to — to have the person taken away and trampled upon."

Ah! here was Alfred. Having stolen in unobserved, he playfully leaned on the back of Sophronia's chair, and, as Miss Podsnap saw him, put one of Sophronia's wandering locks to his lips, and waved a kiss from it towards Miss Podsnap.

"What is this about husbands and detestations?" inquired the captivating Alfred.

"Why, they say," returned his wife, "that listeners never hear any good of themselves; though you — but pray how long have you been here, sir?"

"This instant arrived, my own."

"Then I may go on — though if you had been here but a moment or two sooner, you would have heard your praises sounded by Georgiana."

"Only, if they were to be called praises at all, which I really don't think they were," explained Miss Podsnap in a flutter, "for being so devoted to Sophronia."

"Sophronia!" murmured Alfred. "My life!" and kissed her hand. In return for which she kissed his watch-chain.

"But it was not I who was to be taken away and trampled upon, I hope?" said Alfred, drawing a seat between them.

"Ask Georgiana, my soul," replied his wife.

Alfred touchingly appealed to Georgiana.

"Oh, it was nobody," replied Miss Podsnap. "It was nonsense."

"But if you are determined to know, Mr. Inquisitive Pet, as I suppose you are," said the happy and fond Sophronia, smiling, "it was any one who should venture to aspire to Georgiana."

"Sophronia, my love," remonstrated Mr. Lammle, becoming graver, "you are not serious?"

"Alfred, my love," returned his wife, "I dare say Georgiana was not, but I am."

"Now this," said Mr. Lammle, "shows the accidental combinations that there are in things! Could you believe, my Ownest, that I came in here with the name of an aspirant to our Georgiana on my lips?"

"Of course I could believe, Alfred," said Mrs. Lammle, "anything that *you* told me."

"You dear one! And I anything that *you* told me."

How delightful those interchanges, and the looks accompanying them! Now, if the skeleton up stairs had taken that opportunity, for instance, of calling out, "Here I am, suffocating in the closet!"

"I give you my honour, my dear Sophronia —"

"And I know what that is, love," said she.

"You do, my darling — that I came into the room all but uttering young Fledgeby's name. Tell Georgiana, dearest, about young Fledgeby."

"Oh, no, don't! Please don't!" cried Miss Podsnap, putting her fingers in her ears. "I'd rather not."

Mrs. Lammle laughed in her gayest manner, and removing her Georgiana's unresisting hands, and playfully holding them in her own at arms' length, sometimes near together and sometimes wide apart, went on: —

"You must know, you dearly beloved little goose, that once upon a time there was a certain person called young Fledgeby. And this young Fledgeby, who was of an excellent family and rich, was known to two other certain persons, dearly attached to one another, and called Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lammle. So this young Fledgeby, being one night at the play, there sees with Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lammle a certain heroine called —"

"No, don't say Georgiana Podsnap!" pleaded that young lady, almost in tears. "Please don't. Oh, do do do say somebody else! Not Georgiana Podsnap. Oh, don't, don't, don't!"

"No other," said Mrs. Lammle, laughing airily, and, full of affectionate blandishments, opening and closing Georgiana's arms like a pair of compasses, "than my little Georgiana Podsnap. So this young Fledgeby goes to that Alfred Lammle and says —"

"Oh, ple-e-e-ease don't!" cried Georgiana, as if the suppli-

cation were being squeezed out of her by powerful compression. "I so hate him for saying it!"

"For saying what, my dear?" laughed Mrs. Lammle.

"Oh, I don't know what he said," cried Georgiana wildly, "but I hated him all the same for saying it."

"My dear," said Mrs. Lammle, always laughing in her most captivating way, "the poor young fellow only says that he is stricken all of a heap."

"Oh, what shall I ever do!" interposed Georgiana. "Oh, my goodness, what a Fool he must be!"

"— And implores to be asked to dinner, and to make a fourth at the play another time. And so he dines to-morrow and goes to the Opera with us. That's all. Except, my dear Georgiana — and what will you think of this! — that he is infinitely shyer than you, and far more afraid of you than you ever were of any one in all your days!"

In perturbation of mind Miss Podsnap still fumed and plucked at her hands a little, but could not help laughing at the notion of anybody's being afraid of her. With that advantage, Sophronia flattered her and rallied her more successfully, and then the insinuating Alfred flattered her and rallied her, and promised that at any moment when she might require that service at his hands, he would take young Fledgeby out and trample on him. Thus it remained amicably understood that young Fledgeby was to come to admire, and that Georgiana was to come to be admired; and Georgiana, with the entirely new sensation in her breast of having that prospect before her, and with many kisses from her dear Sophronia in present possession, preceded six feet one of discontented footman (an amount of the article that always came for her when she walked home) to her father's dwelling.

The happy pair being left together, Mrs. Lammle said to her husband: —

"If I understand this girl, sir, your dangerous fascinations have produced some effect upon her. I mention the conquest in good time, because I apprehend your scheme to be more important to you than your vanity."

There was a mirror on the wall before them, and her eyes just caught him smirking in it. She gave the reflected image a look of the deepest disdain, and the image received it in the glass. Next moment they quietly eyed each other, as if they,

the principals, had had no part in that expressive transaction.

It may have been that Mrs. Lammle tried in some manner to excuse her conduct to herself by depreciating the poor little victim of whom she spoke with acrimonious contempt. It may have been, too, that in this she did not quite succeed, for it is very difficult to resist confidence, and she knew she had Georgiana's.

Nothing more was said between the happy pair. Perhaps conspirators who have once established an understanding may not be over-fond of repeating the terms and objects of their conspiracy. Next day came; came Georgiana; and came Fledgeby.

Georgiana had by this time seen a good deal of the house and its frequenters. As there was a certain handsome room with a billiard-table in it — on the ground-floor, eating out a back yard — which might have been Mr. Lammle's office, or library, but was called by neither name, but simply Mr. Lammle's room, so it would have been hard for stronger female heads than Georgiana's to determine whether its frequenters were men of pleasure or men of business. Between the room and the men there were strong points of general resemblance. Both were too gaudy, too slangy, too odorous of cigars, and too much given to horseflesh; the latter characteristic being exemplified in the room by its decorations, and in the men by their conversation. High-stepping horses seemed necessary to all Mr. Lammle's friends — as necessary as their transaction of business together in a gipsy way at untimely hours of the morning and evening, and in rushes and snatches. There were friends who seemed to be always coming and going across the Channel, on errands about the Bourse, and Greek and Spanish and India and Mexican and par and premium and discount and three quarters and seven eighths. There were other friends who seemed to be always lolling and lounging in and out of the City, on questions of the Bourse, and Greek and Spanish and India and Mexican and par and premium and discount and three quarters and seven eighths. They were all feverish, boastful, and indefinably loose; and they all ate and drank a great deal; and made bets in eating and drinking. They all spoke of sums of money, and only mentioned the sums and left the money to be understood; as "five and forty thousand Tom," or "Two hundred and twenty-two on every individual share in the lot Joe." They seemed to divide the world into two classes of people:

people who were making enormous fortunes, and people who were being enormously ruined. They were always in a hurry, and yet seemed to have nothing tangible to do; except a few of them (these mostly asthmatic and thick-lipped) who were for ever demonstrating to the rest, with gold-pencil cases which they could hardly hold because of the big rings on their fore-fingers, how money was to be made. Lastly, they all swore at their grooms, and the grooms were not quite as respectful or complete as other men's grooms; seeming somehow to fall short of the groom point as their masters fell short of the gentleman point.

Young Fledgeby was none of these. Young Fledgeby had a peachy cheek, or a cheek compounded of the peach and the red red red wall on which it grows, and was an awkward, sandy-haired, small-eyed youth, exceedingly slim (his enemies would have said lanky), and prone to self-examination in the articles of whisker and mustache. While feeling for the whisker that he anxiously expected, Fledgeby underwent remarkable fluctuations of spirits, ranging along the whole scale from confidence to despair. There were times when he started, as exclaiming, "By Jupiter, here it is at last!" There were other times when, being equally depressed, he would be seen to shake his head, and give up hope. To see him at those periods leaning on a chimney-piece, like as on an urn containing the ashes of his ambition, with the cheek that would not sprout, upon the hand on which that cheek had forced conviction, was a distressing sight.

Not so was Fledgeby seen on this occasion. Arrayed in superb raiment, with his opera hat under his arm, he concluded his self-examination hopefully, awaited the arrival of Miss Podsnap, and talked small-talk with Mrs. Lammle. In facetious homage to the smallness of his talk, and the jerky nature of his manners, Fledgeby's familiars had agreed to confer upon him (behind his back) the honorary title of Fascination Fledgeby.

"Warm weather, Mrs. Lammle," said Fascination Fledgeby. Mrs. Lammle thought it scarcely as warm as it had been yesterday. "Perhaps not," said Fascination Fledgeby, with great quickness of repartee; "but I expect it will be devilish warm to-morrow."

He threw off another little scintillation. "Been out to-day, Mrs. Lammle?"

Mrs. Lammle answered, for a short drive.

"Some people," said Fascination Fledgeby, "are accustomed to take long drives; but it generally appears to me that if they make 'em too long, they overdo it."

Being in such feather, he might have surpassed himself in his next sally, had not Miss Podsnap been announced. Mrs. Lammle flew to embrace her darling little Georgy, and when the first transports were over, presented Mr. Fledgeby. Mr. Lammle came on the scene last, for he was always late, and so were the frequenters always late; all hands being bound to be made late, by private information about the Bourse, and Greek and Spanish and India and Mexican and par and premium and discount and three quarters and seven eighths.

A handsome little dinner was served immediately, and Mr. Lammle sat sparkling at his end of the table, with his servant behind his chair, and *his* ever-lingering doubts upon the subject of his wages behind himself. Mr. Lammle's utmost powers of sparkling were in requisition to-day, for Fascination Fledgeby and Georgiana not only struck each other speechless, but struck each other into astonishing attitudes; Georgiana, as she sat facing Fledgeby, making such efforts to conceal her elbows as were totally incompatible with the use of a knife and fork; and Fledgeby, as he sat facing Georgiana, avoiding her countenance by every possible device, and betraying the discomposure of his mind in feeling for his whiskers with his spoon, his wine-glass, and his bread.

So Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lammle had to prompt, and this is how they prompted.

"Georgiana," said Mr. Lammle, low and smiling, and sparkling all over, like a harlequin; "you are not in your usual spirits. Why are you not in your usual spirits, Georgiana?"

Georgiana faltered that she was much the same as she was in general; she was not aware of being different.

"Not aware of being different!" retorted Mr. Alfred Lammle. "You, my dear Georgiana! who are always so natural and unconstrained with us! who are such a relief from the crowd that are all alike! who are the embodiment of gentleness, simplicity, and reality!"

Miss Podsnap looked at the door, as if she entertained confused thoughts of taking refuge from these compliments in flight.

"Now, I will be judged," said Mr. Lammle, raising his voice a little, "by my friend Fledgeby."

"Oh DON'T!" Miss Podsnap faintly ejaculated, when Mrs. Lammle took the prompt-book.

"I beg your pardon, Alfred, my dear, but I cannot part with Mr. Fledgeby quite yet; you must wait for him a moment. Mr. Fledgeby and I are engaged in a personal discussion."

Fledgeby must have conducted it on his side with immense art, for no appearance of uttering one syllable had escaped him.

"A personal discussion, Sophronia, my love? What discussion? Fledgeby, I am jealous. What discussion, Fledgeby?"

"Shall I tell him, Mr. Fledgeby?" asked Mrs. Lammle.

Trying to look as if he knew anything about it, Fascination replied, "Yes, tell him."

"We were discussing then," said Mrs. Lammle, "if you *must* know, Alfred, whether Mr. Fledgeby was in his usual flow of spirits."

"Why, that is the very point, Sophronia, that Georgiana and I were discussing as to herself! What did Fledgeby say?"

"Oh, a likely thing, sir, that I am going to tell you everything, and be told nothing! What did Georgiana say?"

"Georgiana said she was doing her usual justice to herself to-day, and I said she was not."

"Precisely," exclaimed Mrs. Lammle, "what I said to Mr. Fledgeby."

Still, it would n't do. They would not look at one another. No, not even when the sparkling host proposed that the quartette should take an appropriately sparkling glass of wine. Georgiana looked from her wine-glass at Mr. Lammle and at Mrs. Lammle; but might n't, could n't, should n't, would n't, look at Mr. Fledgeby. Fascination looked from his wine-glass at Mrs. Lammle and at Mr. Lammle; but might n't, could n't, should n't, would n't, look at Georgiana.

More prompting was necessary. Cupid must be brought up to the mark. The manager had put him down in the bill for the part, and he must play it.

"Sophronia, my dear," said Mr. Lammle, "I don't like the colour of your dress."

"I appeal," said Mrs. Lammle, "to Mr. Fledgeby."

"And I," said Mr. Lammle, "to Georgiana."

"Georgy, my love," remarked Mrs. Lammle aside to her dear

girl, "I rely upon you not to go over to the opposition. Now, Mr. Fledgeby."

Fascination wished to know if the colour were not called rose-colour? Yes, said Mr. Lammle; actually he knew everything; it was really rose-colour. Fascination took rose-colour to mean the colour of roses. (In this he was very warmly supported by Mr. and Mrs. Lammle.) Fascination had heard the term Queen of Flowers applied to the Rose. Similarly, it might be said that the dress was the Queen of Dresses. ("Very happy, Fledgeby!" from Mr. Lammle.) Notwithstanding, Fascination's opinion was that we all had our eyes — or at least a large majority of us — and that — and — and his further opinion was several ands, with nothing beyond them.

"Oh, Mr. Fledgeby," said Mrs. Lammle, "to desert me in that way! Oh, Mr. Fledgeby, to abandon my poor dear injured rose and declare for blue!"

"Victory, victory!" cried Mr. Lammle; "your dress is condemned, my dear."

"But what," said Mrs. Lammle, stealing her affectionate hand towards her dear girl's, — "what does Georgy say?"

"She says," replied Mr. Lammle, interpreting for her, "that in her eyes you look well in any colour, Sophronia, and that if she had expected to be embarrassed by so pretty a compliment as she has received, she would have worn another colour herself. Though I tell her, in reply, that it would not have saved her, for whatever colour she had worn would have been Fledgeby's colour. But what does Fledgeby say?"

"He says," replied Mrs. Lammle, interpreting for him, and patting the back of her dear girl's hand, as if it were Fledgeby who was patting it, "that it was no compliment, but a little natural act of homage that he could n't resist. And," expressing more feeling as if it were more feeling on the part of Fledgeby, "he is right, he is right!"

Still, no not even now, would they look at one another. Seeming to gnash his sparkling teeth, studs, eyes, and buttons, all at once, Mr. Lammle secretly bent a dark frown on the two, expressive of an intense desire to bring them together by knocking their heads together.

"Have you heard this opera of to-night, Fledgeby?" he asked, stopping very short, to prevent himself from running on into "confound you."

"Why no, not exactly," said Fledgeby. "In fact, I don't know a note of it."

"Neither do you know it, Georgy?" said Mrs. Lammle.

"No-no," replied Georgiana faintly, under the sympathetic coincidence.

"Why, then," said Mrs. Lammle, charmed by the discovery which flowed from the premises, "you neither of you know it! How charming!"

Even the craven Fledgeby felt that the time was now come when he must strike a blow. He struck it by saying, partly to Mrs. Lammle and partly to the circumambient air, "I consider myself very fortunate in being reserved by —"

As he stopped dead, Mr. Lammle, making that gingerous bush of his whiskers to look out of, offered him the word "Destiny."

"No, I was n't going to say that," said Fledgeby. "I was going to say Fate. I consider it very fortunate that Fate has written in the book of — in the book which is its own property — that I should go to that opera for the first time under the memorable circumstances of going with Miss Podsnap."

To which Georgiana replied, hooking her two little fingers in one another, and addressing the tablecloth, "Thank you, but I generally go with no one but you, Sophronia, and I like that very much."

Content perforce with this success for the time, Mr. Lammle let Miss Podsnap out of the room, as if he were opening her cage door, and Mrs. Lammle followed. Coffee being presently served up stairs, he kept a watch on Fledgeby until Miss Podsnap's cup was empty, and then directed him with his finger (as if that young gentleman were a slow Retriever) to go and fetch it. This feat he performed, not only without failure, but even with the original embellishment of informing Miss Podsnap that green tea was considered bad for the nerves. Though there Miss Podsnap unintentionally threw him out by faltering, "Oh, is it indeed? How does it act?" Which he was not prepared to elucidate.

The carriage announced, Mrs. Lammle said, "Don't mind me, Mr. Fledgeby, my skirts and cloak occupy both my hands, take Miss Podsnap." And he took her, and Mrs. Lammle went next, and Mr. Lammle went last, savagely following his little flock, like a drover.

But he was all sparkle and glitter in the box at the Opera, and there he and his dear wife made a conversation between Fledgeby and Georgiana in the following ingenious and skilful manner. They sat in this order: Mrs. Lammle, Fascination Fledgeby, Georgiana, Mr. Lammle. Mrs. Lammle made leading remarks to Fledgeby, only requiring monosyllabic replies. Mr. Lammle did the like with Georgiana. At times Mrs. Lammle would lean forward to address Mr. Lammle to this purpose.

"Alfred, my dear, Mr. Fledgeby very justly says, apropos of the last scene, that true constancy would not require any such stimulant as the stage deems necessary." To which Mr. Lammle would reply, "Ay, Sophronia, my love, but as Georgiana has observed to me, the lady had no sufficient reason to know the state of the gentleman's affections." To which Mrs. Lammle would rejoin, "Very true, Alfred; but Mr. Fledgeby points out," this. To which Alfred would demur: "Undoubtedly, Sophronia, but Georgiana acutely remarks," that. Through this device the two young people conversed at great length and committed themselves to a variety of delicate sentiments, without having once opened their lips, save to say yes or no, and even that not to one another.

Fledgeby took his leave of Miss Podsnap at the carriage door, and the Lammles dropped her at her own home, and on the way Mrs. Lammle archly rallied her, in her fond and protecting manner, by saying at intervals, "Oh, little Georgiana, little Georgiana!" Which was not much; but the tone added, "You have enslaved your Fledgeby."

And thus the Lammles got home at last, and the lady sat down moody and weary, looking at her dark lord engaged in a deed of violence with a bottle of soda-water as though he were wringing the neck of some unlucky creature, and pouring its blood down his throat. As he wiped his dripping whiskers in an ogreish way, he met her eyes, and pausing, said, with no very gentle voice: —

"Well?"

"Was such an absolute Booby necessary to the purpose?"

"I know what I am doing. He is no such dolt as you suppose."

"A genius, perhaps?"

"You sneer, perhaps; and you take a lofty air upon yourself, perhaps! But I tell you this: when that young fel-

low's interest is concerned, he holds as tight as a horse-leech. When money is in question with that young fellow, he is a match for the Devil."

"Is he a match for you?"

"He is. Almost as good a one as you thought me for you. He has no quality of youth in him, but such as you have seen to-day. Touch him upon money, and you touch no booby then. He really is a dolt, I suppose, in other things; but it answers his one purpose very well."

"Has she money in her own right in any case?"

"Ay! she has money in her own right in any case. You have done so well to-day, Sophronia, that I answer the question, though you know I object to any such questions. You have done so well to-day, Sophronia, that you must be tired. Get to bed."

CHAPTER V

MERCURY PROMPTING

FLEDGEBY deserved Mr. Alfred Lammle's eulogium. He was the meanest cur existing, with a single pair of legs. And instinct (a word we all clearly understand) going largely on four legs, and reason always on two, meanness on four legs never attains the perfection of meanness on two.

The father of this young gentleman had been a money-lender, who had transacted professional business with the mother of this young gentleman, when he, the latter, was waiting in the vast dark ante-chambers of the present world to be born. The lady, a widow, being unable to pay the money-lender, married him; and in due course, Fledgeby was summoned out of the vast dark ante-chambers to come and be presented to the Registrar-General. Rather a curious speculation how Fledgeby would otherwise have disposed of his leisure until Doomsday.

Fledgeby's mother offended her family by marrying Fledgeby's father. It is one of the easiest achievements in life to offend your family when your family want to get rid of you. Fledgeby's mother's family had been very much offended with her for being poor, and broke with her for becoming comparatively rich. Fledgeby's mother's family was the Snigsworth family. She had even the high honour to be cousin to Lord Snigsworth — so many times removed that the noble earl would have had no compunction in removing her one time more and dropping her clean outside the cousinly pale; but cousin for all that.

Among her pre-matrimonial transactions with Fledgeby's father, Fledgeby's mother had raised money of him at a great disadvantage on a certain reversionary interest. The reversion falling in soon after they were married, Fledgeby's father laid hold of the cash for his separate use and benefit. This led to subjective differences of opinion, not to say objective interchanges of boot-jacks, backgammon boards, and other such

domestic missiles, between Fledgeby's father and Fledgeby's mother, and those led to Fledgeby's mother spending as much money as she could, and to Fledgeby's father doing all he could n't to restrain her. Fledgeby's childhood had been, in consequence, a stormy one; but the winds and the waves had gone down in the grave, and Fledgeby flourished alone.

He lived in chambers in the Albany, did Fledgeby, and maintained a spruce appearance. But his youthful fire was all composed of sparks from the grindstone; and as the sparks flew off, went out, and never warmed anything, be sure that Fledgeby had his tools at the grindstone, and turned it with a wary eye.

Mr. Alfred Lammle came round to the Albany to breakfast with Fledgeby. Present on the table, one scanty pot of tea, one scanty loaf, two scanty pats of butter, two scanty rashers of bacon, two pitiful eggs, and an abundance of handsome china bought a second-hand bargain.

"What did you think of Georgiana?" asked Mr. Lammle.

"Why, I 'll tell you," said Fledgeby, very deliberately.

"Do, my boy."

"You misunderstand me," said Fledgeby. "I don't mean I 'll tell you that. I mean I 'll tell you something else."

"Tell me anything, old fellow!"

"Ah, but there you misunderstand me again," said Fledgeby. "I mean I 'll tell you nothing."

Mr. Lammle sparkled at him, but frowned at him, too.

"Look here," said Fledgeby. "You 're deep and you 're ready. Whether I am deep or not, never mind. I am not ready. But I can do one thing, Lammle, I can hold my tongue. And I intend always doing it."

"You are a long-headed fellow, Fledgeby."

"Maybe, or may not be. If I am a short-tongued fellow, it may amount to the same thing. Now, Lammle, I am never going to answer questions."

"My dear fellow, it was the simplest question in the world."

"Never mind. It seemed so, but things are not always what they seem. I saw a man examined as a witness in Westminster Hall. Questions put to him seemed the simplest in the world, but turned out to be anything rather than that, after he had answered 'em. Very well. Then he should have held

his tongue. If he had held his tongue he would have kept out of scrapes that he got into."

"If I had held my tongue, you would never have seen the subject of my question," remarked Lammle, darkening.

"Now, Lammle," said Fascination Fledgeby, calmly feeling for his whisker, "it won't do. I won't be led on into a discussion. I can't manage a discussion. But I can manage to hold my tongue."

"Can?" Mr. Lammle fell back upon propitiation. "I should think you could! Why, when these fellows of our acquaintance drink and you drink with them, the more talkative they get, the more silent you get. The more they let out, the more you keep in."

"I don't object, Lammle," returned Fledgeby, with an internal chuckle, "to being understood, though I object to being questioned. That certainly *is* the way I do it."

"And when all the rest of us are discussing our ventures, none of us ever know what a single venture of yours is!"

"And none of you ever will from me, Lammle," replied Fledgeby, with another internal chuckle; "that certainly *is* the way I do it!"

"Why of course it is, I know!" rejoined Lammle, with a flourish of frankness, and a laugh, and stretching out his hands as if to show the universe a remarkable man in Fledgeby. "If I had n't known it of my Fledgeby, should I have proposed our little compact of advantage to my Fledgeby?"

"Ah!" remarked Fascination, shaking his head slily. "But I am not to be got at in that way. I am not vain. That sort of vanity don't pay, Lammle. No, no, no. Compliments only make me hold my tongue the more."

Alfred Lammle pushed his plate away (no great sacrifice under the circumstances of there being so little in it), thrust his hands in his pockets, leaned back in his chair, and contemplated Fledgeby in silence. Then he slowly released his left hand from its pocket, and made that bush of his whiskers, still contemplating him in silence. Then he slowly broke silence, and slowly said: "What — the — Dev-il is this fellow about this morning?"

"Now, look here, Lammle," said Fascination Fledgeby, with the meanest of twinkles in his meanest of eyes, — which were too near together, by the way, — "look here, Lammle; I

am very well aware that I didn't show to advantage last night, and that you and your wife — who, I consider, is a very clever woman and an agreeable woman — did. I am not calculated to show to advantage under that sort of circumstances. I know very well you two did show to advantage, and managed capitally. But don't you on that account come talking to me as if I was your doll and puppet, because I am not."

"And all this," cried Alfred, after studying with a look the meanness that was fain to have the meanest help, and yet was so mean as to turn upon it — "all this because of one simple, natural question!"

"You should have waited till I thought proper to say something about it of myself. I don't like your coming over me with your Georgianas, as if you was her proprietor and mine, too."

"Well, when you are in the gracious mind to say anything about it of yourself," retorted Lammle, "pray do."

"I have done it. I have said you managed capitally. You and your wife both. If you'll go on managing capitally, I'll go on doing my part. Only don't crow."

"I crow!" exclaimed Lammle, shrugging his shoulders.

"Or," pursued the other — "or take it in your head that people are your puppets because they don't come out to advantage at the particular moments when you do, with the assistance of a very clever and agreeable wife. All the rest keep on doing, and let Mrs. Lammle keep on doing. Now, I have held my tongue when I thought proper, and I have spoken when I thought proper, and there's an end of that. And now the question is," proceeded Fledgeby, with the greatest reluctance, "will you have another egg?"

"No, I won't," said Lammle shortly.

"Perhaps you're right and will find yourself better without it," replied Fascination, in greatly improved spirits. "To ask you if you'll have another rasher would be unmeaning flattery, for it would make you thirsty all day. Will you have some more bread and butter?"

"No, I won't," repeated Lammle.

"Then I will," said Fascination. And it was not a mere retort for the sound's sake, but was a cheerful, cogent consequence of the refusal; for if Lammle had applied himself again to the loaf, it would have been so heavily visited, in Fledgeby's

opinion, as to demand abstinence from bread, on his part, for the remainder of that meal at least, if not for the whole of the next.

Whether this young gentleman (for he was but three-and-twenty) combined with the miserly vice of an old man any of the open-handed vices of a young one, was a moot point; so very honourably did he keep his own counsel. He was sensible of the value of appearances as an investment, and liked to dress well; but he drove a bargain for every movable about him, from the coat on his back to the china on his breakfast-table; and every bargain, by representing somebody's ruin or somebody's loss, acquired a peculiar charm for him. It was a part of his avarice to take, within narrow bounds, long odds at races; if he won, he drove harder bargains; if he lost, he half starved himself until next time. Why money should be so precious to an Ass too dull and mean to exchange it for any other satisfaction is strange; but there is no animal so sure to get laden with it as the Ass who sees nothing written on the face of the earth and sky but the three letters L. S. D. — not Luxury, Sensuality, Dissoluteness, which they often stand for, but the three dry letters. Your concentrated Fox is seldom comparable to your concentrated Ass in money-breeding.

Fascination Fledgeby feigned to be a young gentleman living on his means, but was known secretly to be a kind of outlaw in the bill-broking line, and to put money out at high interest in various ways. His circle of familiar acquaintance, from Mr. Lammle round, all had a touch of the outlaw, as to their rovings in the merry greenwood of Jobbery Forest, lying on the outskirts of the Share Market and the Stock Exchange.

"I suppose you, Lammle," said Fledgeby, eating his bread and butter, "always did go in for female society?"

"Always," replied Lammle, glooming considerably under his late treatment.

"Came natural to you, eh?" said Fledgeby.

"The sex were pleased to like me, sir," said Lammle sulkily, but with the air of a man who had not been able to help himself.

"Made a pretty good thing of marrying, did n't you?" asked Fledgeby.

The other smiled (an ugly smile), and tapped one tap upon his nose.

"My late governor made a mess of it," said Fledgeby. "But Geor — is the right name Georgina or Georgiana?"

"Georgiana."

"I was thinking yesterday, I did n't know there was such a name. I thought it must end in ina."

"Why?"

"Why, you play — if you can — the Concertina, you know," replied Fledgeby, meditating very slowly. "And you have — when you catch it — the Scarlatina. And you can come down from a balloon in a parach — no, you can't, though. Well, say Georgeute — I mean Georgiana."

"You were going to remark of Georgiana — ?" Lammle moodily hinted, after waiting in vain.

"I was going to remark of Georgiana, sir," said Fledgeby, not at all pleased to be reminded of his having forgotten it, "that she don't seem to be violent. Don't seem to be of the pitching-in order."

"She has the gentleness of the dove, Mr. Fledgeby."

"Of course you 'll say so," replied Fledgeby, sharpening, the moment his interest was touched by another. "But you know, the real look-out is this: what I say, not what you say. I say — having my late governor and my late mother in my eye — that Georgiana don't seem to be of the pitching-in order."

The respected Mr. Lammle was a bully, by nature and by usual practice. Perceiving, as Fledgeby's affronts cumulated, that conciliation by no means answered the purpose here, he now directed a scowling look into Fledgeby's small eyes for the effect of the opposite treatment. Satisfied by what he saw there, he burst into a violent passion and struck his hand upon the table, making the china ring and dance.

"You are a very offensive fellow, sir," cried Mr. Lammle, rising. "You are a highly offensive scoundrel. What do you mean by this behaviour?"

"I say!" remonstrated Fledgeby. "Don't break out."

"You are a very offensive fellow, sir," repeated Mr. Lammle. "You are a highly offensive scoundrel!"

"I *say*, you know!" urged Fledgeby, quailing.

"Why, you coarse and vulgar vagabond!" said Mr. Lammle, looking fiercely about him; "if your servant was here to give me sixpence of your money to get my boots cleaned afterwards — for you are not worth the expenditure — I 'd kick you."

"No, you would n't," pleaded Fledgeby. "I am sure you 'd think better of it."

"I tell you what, Mr. Fledgeby," said Lammle, advancing on him. "Since you presume to contradict me, I 'll assert myself a little. Give me your nose!"

Fledgeby covered it with his hand instead, and said, retreating, "I beg you won't!"

"Give me your nose, sir," repeated Lammle.

Still covering that feature and backing, Mr. Fledgeby reiterated (apparently with a severe cold in his head), "I beg, I beg, you won't."

"And this fellow," exclaimed Lammle, stopping and making the most of his chest — "this fellow presumes on my having selected him out of all the young fellows I know, for an advantageous opportunity! This fellow presumes on my having in my desk round the corner his dirty note of hand for a wretched sum payable on the occurrence of a certain event, which event can only be of my and my wife's bringing about! This fellow, Fledgeby, presumes to be impertinent to me, Lammle. Give me your nose, sir!"

"No! Stop! I beg your pardon," said Fledgeby, with humility.

"What do you say, sir?" demanded Mr. Lammle, seeming too furious to understand.

"I beg your pardon," repeated Fledgeby.

"Repeat your words louder, sir. The just indignation of a gentleman has sent the blood boiling to my head. I don't hear you."

"I say," repeated Fledgeby, with laborious explanatory politeness, "I beg your pardon."

Mr. Lammle paused. "As a man of honour," said he, throwing himself into a chair, "I am disarmed."

Mr. Fledgeby also took a chair, though less demonstratively, and by slow approaches removed his hand from his nose. Some natural diffidence assailed him as to blowing it, so shortly after its having assumed a personal and delicate, not to say public character; but he overcame his scruples by degrees, and modestly took that liberty under an implied protest.

"Lammle," he said sneakingly, when that was done, "I hope we are friends again?"

"Mr. Fledgeby," returned Lammle, "say no more."

"I must have gone too far in making myself disagreeable," said Fledgeby, "but I never intended it."

"Say no more, say no more!" Mr. Lammle repeated, in a magnificent tone. "Give me your" — Fledgeby started — "hand."

They shook hands, and on Mr. Lammle's part, in particular, there ensued great geniality. For he was quite as much of a dastard as the other, and had been in equal danger of falling into the second place for good, when he took heart just in time, to act upon the information conveyed to him by Fledgeby's eye.

The breakfast ended in a perfect understanding. Incessant machinations were to be kept at work by Mr. and Mrs. Lammle; love was to be made for Fledgeby, and conquest was to be insured to him; he on his part very humbly admitting his defects as to the softer social arts, and entreating to be backed to the utmost by his two able coadjutors.

Little recked Mr. Podsnap of the traps and toils besetting his Young Person. He regarded her as safe within the Temple of Podsnappery, biding the fulness of time when she, Georgiana, should take him, Fitz-Podsnap, who with all his worldly goods should her endow. It would call a blush into the cheek of his standard Young Person to have anything to do with such matters save to take as directed, and with worldly goods as per settlement to be endowed. Who giveth this woman to be married to this man? I, Podsnap. Perish the daring thought that any smaller creation should come between!

It was a public holiday, and Fledgeby did not recover his spirits or his usual temperature of nose until the afternoon. Walking into the City in the holiday afternoon, he walked against a living stream setting out of it; and thus, when he turned into the precincts of St. Mary Axe, he found a prevalent repose and quiet there. A yellow, overhanging, plaster-fronted house at which he stopped was quiet, too. The blinds were all drawn down, and the inscription Pubsey and Co. seemed to doze in the counting-house window on the ground-floor giving on the sleepy street.

Fledgeby knocked and rang, and Fledgeby rang and knocked, but no one came. Fledgeby crossed the narrow street and looked up at the house windows, but nobody looked down at Fledgeby. He got out of temper, crossed the narrow street again, and pulled the house bell as if it were the house's nose,

and he were taking a hint from his late experience. His ear at the keyhole seemed then, at last, to give him assurance that something stirred within. His eye at the keyhole seemed to confirm his ear, for he angrily pulled the house's nose again, and pulled and continued to pull, until a human nose appeared in the dark doorway.

"Now you, sir!" cried Fledgeby. "These are nice games!"

He addressed an old Jewish man in an ancient coat, long of skirt, and wide of pocket. A venerable man, bald and shining at the top of his head, and with long grey hair flowing down at its sides and mingling with his beard. A man who, with a graceful Eastern action of homage, bent his head and stretched out his hands with the palms downward, as if to deprecate the wrath of a superior.

"What have you been up to?" said Fledgeby, storming at him.

"Generous Christian master," urged the Jewish man, "it being holiday, I looked for no one."

"Holiday be blowed!" said Fledgeby, entering. "What have *you* got to do with holidays? Shut the door."

With his former action the old man obeyed. In the entry hung his rusty, large-brimmed, low-crowned hat, as long out of date as his coat; in the corner near it stood his staff — no walking-stick, but a veritable staff. Fledgeby turned into the counting-house, perched himself on a business stool, and cocked his hat. There were light boxes on shelves in the counting-house, and strings of mock beads hanging up. There were samples of cheap clocks, and samples of cheap vases of flowers. Foreign toys, all.

Perched on the stool with his hat cocked on his head and one of his legs dangling, the youth of Fledgeby hardly contrasted to advantage with the age of the Jewish man as he stood with his bare head bowed, and his eyes (which he only raised in speaking) on the ground. His clothing was worn down to the rusty hue of the hat in the entry, but though he looked shabby he did not look mean. Now, Fledgeby, though not shabby, did look mean.

"You have not told me what you were up to, you sir," said Fledgeby, scratching his head with the brim of his hat.

"Sir, I was breathing the air."

"In the cellar, that you did n't hear?"

"On the housetop."

"Upon my soul! That's a way of doing business."

"Sir," the old man represented with a grave and patient air, "there must be two parties to the transaction of business, and the holiday has left me alone."

"Ah! Can't be buyer and seller, too. That's what the Jews say; ain't it?"

"At least we say truly, if we say so," answered the old man with a smile.

"Your people need speak the truth sometimes, for they lie enough," remarked Fascination Fledgeby.

"Sir, there is," returned the old man with quiet emphasis, "too much untruth among all denominations of men."

Rather dashed, Fascination Fledgeby took another scratch at his intellectual head with his hat, to gain time for rallying.

"For instance," he resumed, as though it were he who had spoken last, "who but you and I ever heard of a poor Jew?"

"The Jews," said the old man, raising his eyes from the ground with his former smile. "They hear of poor Jews often, and are very good to them."

"Bother that!" returned Fledgeby. "You know what I mean. You'd persuade me, if you could, that you are a poor Jew. I wish you'd confess how much you really did make out of my late governor. I should have a better opinion of you."

The old man only bent his head, and stretched out his hands as before.

"Don't go on posturing like a Deaf and Dumb School," said the ingenious Fledgeby, "but express yourself like a Christian — or as nearly as you can."

"I had had sickness and misfortunes, and was so poor," said the old man, "as hopelessly to owe the Father, principal and interest. The son, inheriting, was so merciful as to forgive me both, and place me here."

He made a little gesture as though he kissed the hem of an imaginary garment worn by the noble youth before him. It was humbly done, but picturesquely, and was not abasing to the doer.

"You won't say more, I see," said Fledgeby, looking at him as if he would like to try the effect of extricating a double-tooth or two, "and so it's of no use my putting it to you. But confess this, Riah; who believes you to be poor now?"

"No one," said the old man.

"There you 're right," assented Fledgeby.

"No one," repeated the old man, with a grave, slow wave of his head. "All scout it as a fable. Were I to say, 'This little fancy business is not mine'" — with a lithe sweep of his easily turning hand around him, to comprehend the various objects on the shelves — "'it is the little business of a Christian young gentleman who places me, his servant, in trust and charge here, and to whom I am accountable for every single bead,' they would laugh. When, in the larger money-business, I tell the borrowers —"

"I say, old chap!" interposed Fledgeby, "I hope you mind what you *do* tell 'em?"

"Sir, I tell them no more than I am about to repeat. When I tell them, 'I cannot promise this, I cannot answer for the other, I must see my principal, I have not the money, I am a poor man and it does not rest with me,' they are so unbelieving and so impatient that they sometimes curse me in Jehovah's name."

"That 's deuced good, that is!" said Fascination Fledgeby.

"And at other times they say, 'Can it never be done without these tricks, Mr. Riah? Come, come, Mr. Riah, we know the arts of your people' — my people! — 'If the money is to be lent, fetch it, fetch it; if it is not to be lent, keep it, and say so.' They never believe me."

"*That*'s all right," said Fascination Fledgeby.

"They say, 'We know, Mr. Riah, we know. We have but to look at you, and we know.'"

"Oh, a good 'un are you for the post," thought Fledgeby, "and a good 'un was I to mark you out for it! I may be slow, but I am precious sure."

Not a syllable of this reflection shaped itself in any scrap of Mr. Fledgeby's breath, lest it should tend to put his servant's price up. But looking at the old man as he stood quiet, with his head bowed and his eyes cast down, he felt that to relinquish an inch of his baldness, an inch of his grey hair, an inch of his coat-skirt, an inch of his hat-brim, an inch of his walking-staff, would be to relinquish hundreds of pounds.

"Look here, Riah," said Fledgeby, mollified by these self-approving considerations. "I want to go a little more into buying up queer bills. Look out in that direction."

"Sir, it shall be done."

"Casting my eye over the accounts, I find that branch of business pays pretty fairly, and I am game for extending it. I like to know people's affairs likewise. So, look out."

"Sir, I will, promptly."

"Put it about in the right quarters that you'll buy queer bills by the lump, — by the pound weight if that's all, — supposing you see your way to a fair chance on looking over the parcel. And there's one thing more. Come to me with the books for periodical inspection as usual, at eight on Monday morning."

Riah drew some folding tablets from his breast and noted it down.

"That's all I wanted to say at the present time," continued Fledgeby in a grudging vein, as he got off the stool, "except that I wish you'd take the air where you can hear the bell, or the knocker, either one of the two or both. By the bye, how *do* you take the air at the top of the house? Do you stick your head out of a chimney-pot?"

"Sir, there are leads there, and I have made a little garden there."

"To bury your money in, you old dodger?"

"A thumb-nail's space of garden would hold the treasure *I* bury, master," said Riah. "Twelve shillings a week, even when they are an old man's wages, bury themselves."

"I should like to know what you really are worth," returned Fledgeby, with whom his growing rich on that stipend and gratitude was a very convenient fiction. "But come! Let's have a look at your garden on the tiles, before I go!"

The old man took a step back, and hesitated.

"Truly, sir, I have company there."

"Have you, by George!" said Fledgeby. "I suppose you happen to know whose premises these are?"

"Sir, they are yours, and I am your servant in them."

"Oh! I thought you might have overlooked that," retorted Fledgeby, with his eyes on Riah's beard as he felt for his own; "having company on my premises, you know!"

"Come up and see the guests, sir. I hope for your admission that they can do no harm."

Passing him with a courteous reverence, specially unlike any action that Mr. Fledgeby could for his life have imparted to his

own head and hands, the old man began to ascend the stairs. As he toiled on before, with his palm upon the stair rail, and his long black skirt, a very gaberdine, overhanging each successive step, he might have been the leader in some pilgrimage of devotional ascent to a prophet's tomb. Not troubled by any such weak imagining, Fascination Fledgeby merely speculated on the time of life at which his beard had begun, and thought once more what a good 'un he was for the part.

Some final wooden steps conducted them, stooping under a low penthouse roof, to the housetop. Riah stood still, and, turning to his master, pointed out his guests.

Lizzie Hexam and Jenny Wren; for whom, perhaps with some old instinct of his race, the gentle Jew had spread a carpet. Seated on it, against no more romantic object than a blackened chimney-stack over which some humble creeper had been trained, they both pored over one book; both with attentive faces; Jenny with the sharper; Lizzie with the more perplexed. Another little book or two were lying near, and a common basket of common fruit, and another basket full of strings of beads and tinsel scraps. A few boxes of humble flowers and evergreens completed the garden; and the encompassing wilderness of dowager old chimneys twirled their cowls and fluttered their smoke, rather as if they were bridling, and fanning themselves, and looking on in a state of airy surprise.

Taking her eyes off the book, to test her memory of something in it, Lizzie was the first to see herself observed. As she rose, Miss Wren likewise became conscious, and said, irreverently addressing the great chief of the premises: "Whoever you are, *I* can't get up, because my back 's bad and my legs are queer."

"This is my master," said Riah, stepping forward.

("Don't look like anybody's master," observed Miss Wren to herself, with a hitch of her chin and eyes.)

"This, sir," pursued the old man, "is a little dressmaker for little people. Explain to the master, Jenny."

"Dolls; that 's all," said Jenny shortly. "Very difficult to fit, too, because their figures are so uncertain. You never know where to expect their waists."

"Her friend," resumed the old man, motioning towards Lizzie; "and as industrious as virtuous. But that they both are. They are busy early and late, sir, early and late; and in bye-times, as on this holiday, they go to book-learning."

"Not much good to be got out of that," remarked Fledgeby.

"Depends upon the person!" quoth Miss Wren, snapping him up.

"I made acquaintance with my guests, sir," pursued the Jew, with an evident purpose of drawing out the dressmaker, "through their coming here to buy of our damage and waste for Miss Jenny's millinery. Our waste goes into the best of company, sir, on her rosy-cheeked little customers. They wear it in their hair, and on their ball-dresses, and even (so she tells me) are presented at Court with it."

"Ah!" said Fledgeby, on whose intelligence this doll-fancy made rather strong demands; "she's been buying that basketful to-day, I suppose?"

"I suppose she has," Miss Jenny interposed; "and paying for it, too, most likely!"

"Let's have a look at it," said the suspicious chief. Riah handed it to him. "How much for this now?"

"Two precious silver shillings," said Miss Wren.

Riah confirmed her with two nods, as Fledgeby looked to him. A nod for each shilling.

"Well," said Fledgeby, poking into the contents of the basket with his forefinger, "the price is not so bad. You have got good measure, Miss What-is-it."

"Try Jenny," suggested that young lady with great calmness.

"You have got good measure, Miss Jenny; but the price is not so bad. — And you," said Fledgeby, turning to the other visitor, "do you buy anything here, miss?"

"No, sir."

"Nor sell anything neither, miss?"

"No, sir."

Looking askew at the questioner, Jenny stole her hand up to her friend's, and drew her friend down, so that she bent beside her on her knee.

"We are thankful to come here for rest, sir," said Jenny. "You see, you don't know what the rest of this place is to us; does he, Lizzie? It's the quiet, and the air."

"The quiet!" repeated Fledgeby, with a contemptuous turn of his head towards the City's roar. "And the air!" with a "Poof!" at the smoke.

"Ah!" said Jenny. "But it's so high. And you see the

clouds rushing on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and you see the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky from which the wind comes, and you feel as if you were dead."

The little creature looked above her, holding up her slight, transparent hand.

"How do you feel when you are dead?" asked Fledgeby, much perplexed.

"Oh, so tranquil!" cried the little creature, smiling. "Oh, so peaceful and so thankful! And you hear the people who are alive, crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close, dark streets, and you seem to pity them so! And such a chain has fallen from you, and such a strange, good, sorrowful happiness comes upon you!"

Her eyes fell on the old man, who, with his hands folded, quietly looked on.

"Why, it was only just now," said the little creature, pointing at him, "that I fancied I saw him come out of his grave! He toiled out at that low door so bent and worn, and then he took his breath and stood upright, and looked all round him at the sky, and the wind blew upon him, and his life down in the dark was over! — Till he was called back to life," she added, looking round at Fledgeby with that lower look of sharpness. "Why did you call him back?"

"He was long enough coming, anyhow," grumbled Fledgeby.

"But *you* are not dead, you know," said Jenny Wren. "Get down to life!"

Mr. Fledgeby seemed to think it rather a good suggestion, and with a nod turned round. As Riah followed to attend him down the stairs the little creature called out to the Jew in a silvery tone, "Don't be long gone. Come back, and be dead!" And still as they went down they heard the little sweet voice, more and more faintly, half calling and half singing, "Come back and be dead, Come back and be dead!"

When they got down into the entry, Fledgeby, pausing under the shadow of the broad old hat, and mechanically poising the staff, said to the old man: —

"That 's a handsome girl, that one in her senses."

"And as good as handsome," answered Riah.

"At all events," observed Fledgeby, with a dry whistle, "I hope she ain't bad enough to put any chap up to the fastenings,

and get the premises broken open. You look out. Keep your weather eye awake, and don't make any more acquaintances, however handsome. Of course you always keep my name to yourself ?"

"Sir, assuredly I do."

"If they ask it, say it's Pubsey, or say it's Co, or say it's anything you like, but what it is."

His grateful servant — in whose race gratitude is deep, strong, and enduring — bowed his head, and actually did now put the hem of his coat to his lips, though so lightly that the wearer knew nothing of it.

Thus, Fascination Fledgeby went his way, exulting in the artful cleverness with which he had turned his thumb down on a Jew, and the old man went his different way up stairs. As he mounted, the call or song began to sound in his ears again, and, looking above, he saw the face of the little creature looking down out of a Glory of her long bright radiant hair, and musically repeating to him like a vision: —

"Come up and be dead! Come up and be dead!"

CHAPTER VI

A RIDDLE WITHOUT AN ANSWER

AGAIN Mr. Mortimer Lightwood and Mr. Eugene Wrayburn sat together in the Temple. This evening, however, they were not together in the place of business of the eminent solicitor, but in another dismal set of chambers facing it on the same second-floor; on whose dungeon-like, black, outer door appeared the legend: —

PRIVATE.

MR. EUGENE WRAYBURN.

MR. MORTIMER LIGHTWOOD.

(☞ *Mr. Lightwood's Offices opposite.*)

Appearances indicated that this establishment was a very recent institution. The white letters of the inscription were extremely white and extremely strong to the sense of smell; the complexion of the tables and chairs was (like Lady Tippins's) a little too blooming to be believed in; and the carpets and floor-cloth seemed to rush at the beholder's face in the unusual prominency of their patterns. But the Temple, accustomed to tone down both the still life and the human life that has much to do with it, would soon get the better of all that.

"Well!" said Eugene, on one side of the fire, "I feel tolerably comfortable. I hope the upholsterer may do the same."

"Why should n't he?" asked Lightwood, from the other side of the fire.

"To be sure," pursued Eugene, reflecting, "he is not in the secret of our pecuniary affairs, so perhaps he may be in an easy frame of mind."

"We shall pay him," said Mortimer.

"Shall we, really?" returned Eugene, indolently surprised. "You don't say so!"

"I mean to pay him, Eugene, for my part," said Mortimer, in a slightly injured tone.

"Ah! I mean to pay him, too," retorted Eugene. "But then I mean so much that I — that I don't mean."

"Don't mean?"

"So much that I only mean and shall always only mean and nothing more, my dear Mortimer. It's the same thing."

His friend, lying back in his easy-chair, watched him lying back in his easy-chair, as he stretched out his legs on the hearth-rug, and said, with the amused look that Eugene Wrayburn could always awaken in him without seeming to try or care: —

"Anyhow, your vagaries have increased the bill."

"Calls the domestic virtues vagaries!" exclaimed Eugene, raising his eyes to the ceiling.

"This very complete little kitchen of ours," said Mortimer, "in which nothing will ever be cooked — "

"My dear, dear Mortimer," returned his friend, lazily lifting his head a little to look at him, "how often have I pointed out to you that its moral influence is the important thing?"

"Its moral influence on this fellow!" exclaimed Lightwood laughing.

"Do me the favour," said Eugene, getting out of his chair with much gravity, "to come and inspect that feature of our establishment which you rashly disparage." With that, taking up a candle, he conducted his chum into the fourth room of the set of chambers — a little narrow room — which was very completely and neatly fitted as a kitchen. "See!" said Eugene, "miniature flour-barrel, rolling-pin, spice-box, shelf of brown jars, chopping-board, coffee-mill, dresser elegantly furnished with crockery, saucepans and pans, roasting-jack, a charming kettle, an armoury of dish-covers. The moral influence of these objects, in forming the domestic virtues, may have an immense influence upon me; not upon you, for you are a hopeless case, but upon me. In fact, I have an idea that I feel the domestic virtues already forming. Do me the favour to step into my bedroom. Secrétaire, you see, and abstruse set of solid mahogany pigeon-holes, one for every letter of the alphabet. To what use do I devote them? I receive a bill — say from Jones. I docket it neatly at the secrétaire, JONES, and I put it into pigeon-hole J. It's the next thing to a receipt, and is quite as satisfactory to *me*. And I very much wish, Mortimer," sitting on his bed with the air of a philosopher lecturing a disciple,

"that my example might induce *you* to cultivate habits of punctuality and method; and by means of the moral influences with which I have surrounded you, to encourage the formation of the domestic virtues."

Mortimer laughed again, with his usual commentaries of "How *can* you be so ridiculous, Eugene!" and "What an absurd fellow you are!" but when his laugh was out, there was something serious, if not anxious, in his face. Despite that pernicious assumption of lassitude and indifference, which had become his second nature, he was strongly attached to his friend. He had founded himself upon Eugene when they were yet boys at school; and at this hour imitated him no less, admired him no less, loved him no less, than in those departed days.

"Eugene," said he, "if I could find you in earnest for a minute, I would try to say an earnest word to you."

"An earnest word?" repeated Eugene. "The moral influences are beginning to work. Say on."

"Well, I will," returned the other, "though you are not earnest yet."

"In this desire for earnestness," murmured Eugene, with the air of one who was meditating deeply, "I trace the happy influences of the little flour-barrel and the coffee-mill. Gratifying."

"Eugene," resumed Mortimer, disregarding the light interruption, and laying a hand upon Eugene's shoulder, as he, Mortimer, stood before him seated on his bed, "you are withholding something from me."

Eugene looked at him, but said nothing.

"All this past summer, you have been withholding something from me. Before we entered on our boating vacation, you were as bent upon it as I have seen you upon anything since we first rowed together. But you cared very little for it when it came, often found it a tie and a drag upon you, and were constantly away. Now it was well enough half a dozen times, a dozen times, twenty times, to say to me in your own odd manner, which I know so well and like so much, that your disappearances were precautions against our boring one another; but of course after a short while I began to know that they covered something. I don't ask what it is, as you have not told me; but the fact is so. Say, is it not?"

"I give you my word of honour, Mortimer," returned Eugene, after a serious pause of a few moments, "that I don't know."

"Don't know, Eugene?"

"Upon my soul, don't know. I know less about myself than about most people in the world, and I don't know."

"You have some design in your mind?"

"Have I? I don't think I have."

"At any rate, you have some subject of interest there which used not to be there?"

"I really can't say," replied Eugene, shaking his head blankly, after pausing again to reconsider. "At times I have thought yes; at other times I have thought no. Now, I have been inclined to pursue such a subject; now I have felt that it was absurd, and that it tired and embarrassed me. Absolutely, I can't say. Frankly and faithfully, I would if I could."

So replying, he clapped a hand, in his turn, on his friend's shoulder, as he rose from his seat upon the bed, and said: —

"You must take your friend as he is. You know what I am, my dear Mortimer. You know how dreadfully susceptible I am to boredom. You know that when I became enough of a man to find myself an embodied conundrum, I bored myself to the last degree by trying to find out what I meant. You know that at length I gave it up, and declined to guess any more. Then how can I possibly give you the answer that I have not discovered? The old nursery form runs, 'Riddle-me-riddle-me-ree, pr'aps you can't tell me what this may be?' My reply runs, 'No. Upon my life, I can't.'"

So much of what was fantastically true to his own knowledge of this utterly careless Eugene mingled with the answer that Mortimer could not receive it as a mere evasion. Besides, it was given with an engaging air of openness, and of special exemption of the one friend he valued, from his reckless indifference.

"Come, dear boy!" said Eugene. "Let us try the effect of smoking. If it enlightens me at all on this question, I will impart unreservedly."

They returned to the room they had come from, and, finding it heated, opened a window. Having lighted their cigars, they leaned out of this window, smoking, and looking down at the moonlight, as it shone into the court below.

"No enlightenment," resumed Eugene, after certain minutes of silence. "I feel sincerely apologetic, my dear Mortimer, but nothing comes."

"If nothing comes," returned Mortimer, "nothing can come from it. So I shall hope that this may hold good throughout, and that there may be nothing on foot. Nothing injurious to you, Eugene, or —"

Eugene stayed him for a moment with his hand on his arm, while he took a piece of earth from an old flower-pot on the window-sill and dexterously shot it at a little point of light opposite; having done which to his satisfaction, he said, "Or?"

"— or injurious to any one else."

"How," said Eugene, taking another little piece of earth, and shooting it with great precision at the former mark — "how injurious to any one else?"

"I don't know."

"And," said Eugene, taking, as he said the word, another shot, "to whom else?"

"I don't know."

Checking himself with another piece of earth in his hand, Eugene looked at his friend inquiringly and a little suspiciously. There was no concealed or half-expressed meaning in his face.

"Two belated wanderers in the mazes of the law," said Eugene, attracted by the sound of footsteps, and glancing down as he spoke, "stray into the court. They examine the door-posts of number one, seeking the name they want. Not finding it at number one, they come to number two. On the hat of wanderer number two, the shorter one, I drop this pellet. Hitting him on the hat, I smoke serenely, and become absorbed in contemplation of the sky."

Both the wanderers looked up towards the window; but after interchanging a mutter or two, soon applied themselves to the door-posts below. There they seemed to discover what they wanted, for they disappeared from view by entering at the doorway. "When they emerge," said Eugene, "you shall see me bring them both down;" and so prepared two pellets for the purpose.

He had not reckoned on their seeking his name, or Lightwood's. But either the one or the other would seem to be in question, for now there came a knock at the door. "I am on duty to-night," said Mortimer; "stay you where you are, Eugene." Requiring no persuasion, he stayed there, smoking quietly, and not at all curious to know who knocked, until

Mortimer spoke to him from within the room, and touched him. Then, drawing in his head, he found the visitors to be young Charley Hexam and the schoolmaster, both standing facing him, and both recognised at a glance.

"You recollect this young fellow, Eugene?" said Mortimer.

"Let me look at him," returned Wrayburn coolly. "Oh, yes, yes. I recollect him!"

He had not been about to repeat that former action of taking him by the chin, but the boy had suspected him of it, and had thrown up his arm with an angry start. Laughingly, Wrayburn looked to Lightwood for an explanation of this odd visit.

"He says he has something to say."

"Surely it must be to you, Mortimer."

"So I thought, but he says no. He says it is to you."

"Yes, I do say so," interposed the boy. "And I mean to say what I want to say, too, Mr. Eugene Wrayburn!"

Passing him with his eyes as if there were nothing where he stood, Eugene looked on to Bradley Headstone. With consummate indolence, he turned to Mortimer, inquiring: "And who may this other person be?"

"I am Charles Hexam's friend," said Bradley; "I am Charles Hexam's schoolmaster."

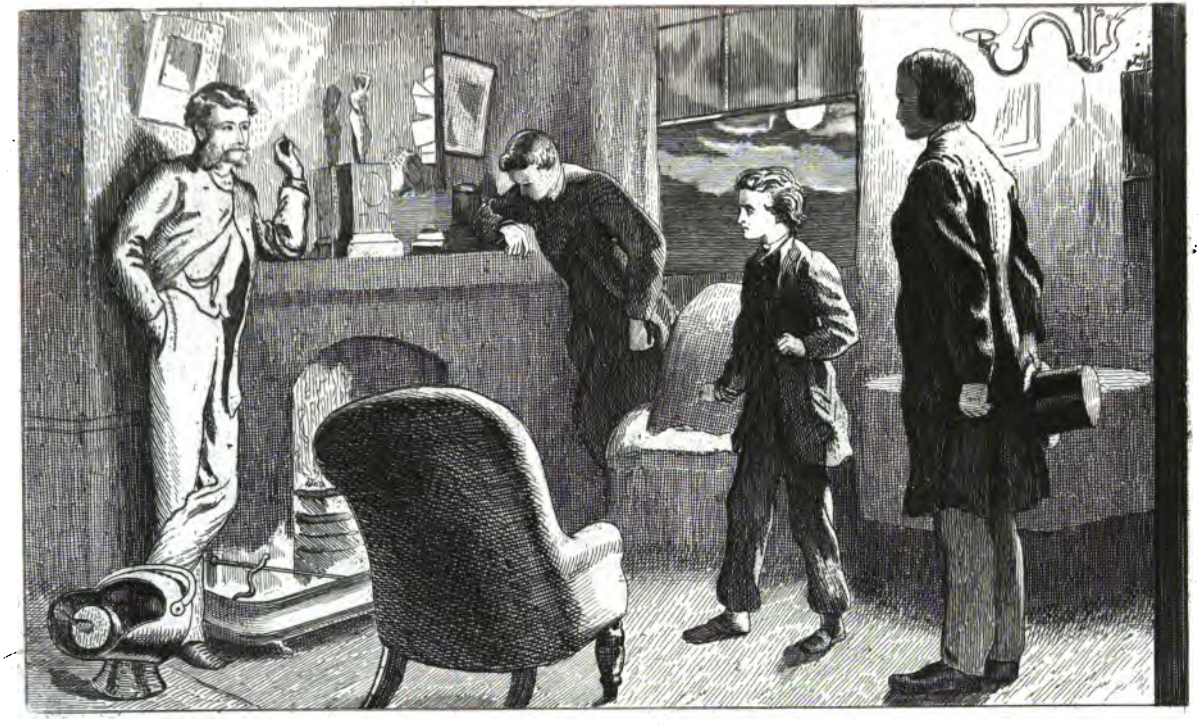
"My good sir, you should teach your pupils better manners," returned Eugene.

Composedly smoking, he leaned an elbow on the chimney-piece, at the side of the fire, and looked at the schoolmaster. It was a cruel look, in its cold disdain of him, as a creature of no worth. The schoolmaster looked at him, and that, too, was a cruel look, though of the different kind, that it had a raging jealousy and fiery wrath in it.

Very remarkably, neither Eugene Wrayburn nor Bradley Headstone looked at all at the boy. Through the ensuing dialogue, those two, no matter who spoke, or who was addressed, looked at each other. There was some secret, sure perception between them, which set them against one another in all ways.

"In some high respects, Mr. Eugene Wrayburn," said Bradley, answering him with pale and quivering lips, "the natural feelings of my pupils are stronger than my teaching."

"In most respects, I dare say," replied Eugene, enjoying his cigar, "though whether high or low is of no importance. You have my name very correctly. Pray what is yours?"



"It cannot concern you much to know, but —"

"True," interposed Eugene, striking sharply and cutting him short at his mistake, "it does not concern me at all to know. I can say Schoolmaster, which is a most respectable title. You are right, Schoolmaster."

It was not the dullest part of this goad in its galling of Bradley Headstone that he had made it himself in a moment of incautious anger. He tried to set his lips so as to prevent their quivering, but they quivered fast.

"Mr. Eugene Wrayburn," said the boy, "I want a word with you. I have wanted it so much that we have looked out your address in the book, and we have been to your office, and we have come from your office here."

"You have given yourself much trouble, Schoolmaster," observed Eugene, blowing the feathery ash from his cigar. "I hope it may prove remunerative."

"And I am glad to speak," pursued the boy, "in presence of Mr. Lightwood, because it was through Mr. Lightwood that you ever saw my sister."

For a mere moment, Wrayburn turned his eyes aside from the schoolmaster to note the effect of the last word on Mortimer, who, standing on the opposite side of the fire, as soon as the word was spoken, turned his face towards the fire and looked down into it.

"Similarly, it was through Mr. Lightwood that you ever saw her again, for you were with him on the night when my father was found, and so I found you with her on the next day. Since then, you have seen my sister often. You have seen my sister oftener and oftener. And I want to know why?"

"Was this worth while, Schoolmaster?" murmured Eugene, with the air of a disinterested adviser. "So much trouble for nothing? You should know best, but I think not."

"I don't know, Mr. Wrayburn," answered Bradley, with his passion rising, "why you address me —"

"Don't you?" said Eugene. "Then I won't."

He said it so tauntingly in his perfect placidity that the respectable right hand clutching the respectable hair-guard of the respectable watch could have wound it round his throat and strangled him with it. Not another word did Eugene deem it worth while to utter, but stood leaning his head upon his hand, smoking, and looking imperturbably at the chafing Bradley

Headstone with his clutching right hand, until Bradley was well nigh mad.

"Mr. Wrayburn," proceeded the boy, "we not only know this that I have charged upon you, but we know more. It has not yet come to my sister's knowledge that we have found it out, but we have. We had a plan, Mr. Headstone and I, for my sister's education, and for its being advised and overlooked by Mr. Headstone, who is a much more competent authority, whatever you may pretend to think, as you smoke, than you could produce, if you tried. Then, what do we find? What do we find, Mr. Lightwood? Why, we find that my sister is already being taught, without our knowing it. We find that, while my sister gives an unwilling and cold ear to our schemes for her advantage, — I, her brother, and Mr. Headstone, the most competent authority, as his certificates would easily prove, that could be produced, — she is wilfully and willingly profiting by other schemes. Ay, and taking pains, too, for I know what such pains are. And so does Mr. Headstone! Well! Somebody pays for this is a thought that naturally occurs to us; who pays? We apply ourselves to find out, Mr. Lightwood, and we find that your friend, this Mr. Eugene Wrayburn, here, pays. Then I ask him what right has he to do it, and what does he mean by it, and how comes he to be taking such a liberty without my consent, when I am raising myself in the scale of society by my own exertions and Mr. Headstone's aid, and have no right to have any darkness cast upon my prospects, or any imputation upon my respectability, through my sister?"

The boyish weakness of this speech, combined with its great selfishness, made it a poor one, indeed. And yet Bradley Headstone, used to the little audience of a school, and unused to the larger ways of men, showed a kind of exultation in it.

"Now I tell Mr. Eugene Wrayburn," pursued the boy, forced into the use of the third person by the hopelessness of addressing him in the first, "that I object to his having any acquaintance at all with my sister, and that I request him to drop it altogether. He is not to take it into his head that I am afraid of my sister's caring for *him* —"

(As the boy sneered, the master sneered, and Eugene blew off the feathery ash again.)

"— but I object to it, and that's enough. I am more important to my sister than he thinks. As I raise myself, I

intend to raise her; she knows that, and she has to look to me for her prospects. Now I understand all this very well, and so does Mr. Headstone. My sister is an excellent girl, but she has some romantic notions; not about such things as your Mr. Eugene Wrayburns, but about the death of my father and other matters of that sort. Mr. Wrayburn encourages those notions to make himself of importance, and so she thinks she ought to be grateful to him, and perhaps even likes to be. Now I don't choose her to be grateful to him, or to be grateful to anybody but me, except Mr. Headstone. And I tell Mr. Wrayburn that if he don't take heed of what I say, it will be worse for her. Let him turn that over in his memory, and make sure of it. Worse for her!"

A pause ensued, in which the schoolmaster looked very awkward.

"May I suggest, Schoolmaster," said Eugene, removing his fast-waning cigar from his lips to glance at it, "that you can now take your pupil away?"

"And Mr. Lightwood," added the boy, with a burning face, under the flaming aggravation of getting no sort of answer or attention, "I hope you 'll take notice of what I have said to your friend, and of what your friend has heard me say, word by word, whatever he pretends to the contrary. You are bound to take notice of it, Mr. Lightwood, for, as I have already mentioned, you first brought your friend into my sister's company, and but for you we never should have seen him. Lord knows none of us ever wanted him, any more than any of us will ever miss him. Now, Mr. Headstone, as Mr. Eugene Wrayburn has been obliged to hear what I had to say, and could n't help himself, and as I have said it out to the last word, we have done all we wanted to do, and may go."

"Go down stairs, and leave me a moment, Hexam," he returned. The boy, complying with an indignant look and as much noise as he could make, swung out of the room; and Lightwood went to the window, and leaned there, looking out.

"You think me of no more value than the dirt under your feet," said Bradley to Eugene, speaking in a carefully weighed and measured tone, or he could not have spoken at all.

"I assure you, Schoolmaster," replied Eugene, "I don't think about you."

"That 's not true," returned the other; "you know better."

"That 's coarse," Eugene retorted; "but you *don't* know better."

"Mr. Wrayburn, at least I know very well that it would be idle to set myself against you in insolent words or overbearing manners. That lad who has just gone out could put you to shame in half a dozen branches of knowledge in half an hour, but you can throw him aside like an inferior. You can do as much by me, I have no doubt, beforehand."

"Possibly," remarked Eugene.

"But I am more than a lad," said Bradley, with his clutching hand, "and I WILL be heard, sir."

"As a schoolmaster," said Eugene, "you are always being heard. That ought to content you."

"But it does not content me," replied the other, white with passion. "Do you suppose that a man, in forming himself for the duties I discharge, and in watching and repressing himself daily to discharge them well, dismisses a man's nature?"

"I suppose you," said Eugene, "judging from what I see as I look at you, to be rather too passionate for a good schoolmaster." As he spoke, he tossed away the end of his cigar.

"Passionate with you, sir, I admit I am. Passionate with you, sir, I respect myself for being. But I have not Devils for my pupils."

"For your Teachers, I should rather say," replied Eugene.

"Mr. Wrayburn."

"Schoolmaster."

"Sir, my name is Bradley Headstone."

"As you justly said, my good sir, your name cannot concern me. Now, what more?"

"This more. Oh, what a misfortune is mine," cried Bradley, breaking off to wipe the starting perspiration from his face as he shook from head to foot, "that I cannot so control myself as to appear a stronger creature than this, when a man who has not felt in all his life what I have felt in a day can so command himself!" He said it in a very agony, and even followed it with an errant motion of his hands as if he could have torn himself.

Eugene Wrayburn looked on at him, as if he found him beginning to be rather an entertaining study.

"Mr. Wrayburn, I desire to say something to you on my own part."

"Come, come, Schoolmaster," returned Eugene, with a languid approach to impatience as the other again struggled with himself, "say what you have to say. And let me remind you that the door is standing open, and your young friend waiting for you on the stairs."

"When I accompanied that youth here, sir, I did so with the purpose of adding, as a man whom you should not be permitted to put aside, in case you put him aside as a boy, that his instinct is correct and right." Thus Bradley Headstone, with great effort and difficulty.

"Is that all?" asked Eugene.

"No, sir," said the other, flushed and fierce. "I strongly support him in his disapproval of your visits to his sister, and in his objection to your officiousness — and worse — in what you have taken upon yourself to do for her."

"Is *that* all?" asked Eugene.

"No, sir. I determined to tell you that you are not justified in these proceedings, and that they are injurious to his sister."

"Are you her schoolmaster as well as her brother's? — Or perhaps you would like to be?" said Eugene.

It was a stab that the blood followed, in its rush to Bradley Headstone's face, as swiftly as if it had been dealt with a dagger. "What do you mean by that?" was as much as he could utter.

"A natural ambition enough," said Eugene coolly. "Far be it from me to say otherwise. The sister — who is something too much upon your lips, perhaps — is so very different from all the associations to which she has been used, and from all the low obscure people about her, that it is a very natural ambition."

"Do you throw my obscurity in my teeth, Mr. Wrayburn?"

"That can hardly be, for I know nothing concerning it, Schoolmaster, and seek to know nothing."

"You reproach me with my origin," said Bradley Headstone; "you cast insinuations at my bringing-up. But I tell you, sir, I have worked my way onward, out of both and in spite of both, and have a right to be considered a better man than you, with better reasons for being proud."

"How I can reproach you with what is not within my knowledge, or how I can cast stones that were never in my hand, is

a problem for the ingenuity of a schoolmaster to prove," returned Eugene. "Is *that* all?"

"No, sir. If you suppose that boy —"

"Who really will be tired of waiting," said Eugene politely.

"If you suppose that boy to be friendless, Mr. Wrayburn, you deceive yourself. I am his friend, and you shall find me so."

"And you will find *him* on the stairs," remarked Eugene.

"You may have promised yourself, sir, that you could do what you chose here, because you had to deal with a mere boy, inexperienced, friendless, and unassisted. But I give you warning that this mean calculation is wrong. You have to do with a man also. You have to do with me. I will support him, and, if need be, require reparation for him. My hand and heart are in this cause, and are open to him."

"And — quite a coincidence — the door is open," remarked Eugene.

"I scorn your shifty evasions, and I scorn you," said the schoolmaster. "In the meanness of your nature you revile me with the meanness of my birth. I hold you in contempt for it. But if you don't profit by this visit, and act accordingly, you will find me as bitterly in earnest against you as I could be if I deemed you worth a second thought on my own account."

With a consciously bad grace and stiff manner, as Wrayburn looked so easily and calmly on, he went out with these words, and the heavy door closed like a furnace door upon his red and white heats of rage.

"A curious monomaniac," said Eugene. "The man seems to believe that everybody was acquainted with his mother!"

Mortimer Lightwood being still at the window, to which he had in delicacy withdrawn, Eugene called to him, and he fell to slowly pacing the room.

"My dear fellow," said Eugene, as he lighted another cigar, "I fear my unexpected visitors have been troublesome. If as a set-off (excuse the legal phrase from a barrister-at-law) you would like to ask Tippins to tea, I pledge myself to make love to her."

"Eugene, Eugene, Eugene," replied Mortimer, still pacing the room, "I am sorry for this. And to think that I have been so blind!"

"How blind, dear boy?" inquired his unmoved friend.

"What were your words that night at the river-side public-house?" said Lightwood, stopping. "What was it that you asked me? Did I feel like a dark combination of traitor and pickpocket when I thought of that girl?"

"I seem to remember the expression," said Eugene.

"How do *you* feel when you think of her just now?"

His friend made no direct reply, but observed, after a few whiffs of his cigar, "Don't mistake the situation. There is no better girl in all this London than Lizzie Hexam. There is no better among my people at home; no better among your people."

"Granted. What follows?"

"There," said Eugene, looking after him dubiously as he paced away to the other end of the room, "you put me again upon guessing the riddle that I have given up."

"Eugene, do you design to capture and desert this girl?"

"My dear fellow, no."

"Do you design to marry her?"

"My dear fellow, no."

"Do you design to pursue her?"

"My dear fellow, I don't design anything. I have no design whatever. I am incapable of designs. If I conceived a design, I should speedily abandon it, exhausted by the operation."

"Oh, Eugene, Eugene!"

"My dear Mortimer, not that tone of melancholy reproach, I entreat. What can I do more than tell you all I know, and acknowledge my ignorance of all I don't know! How does that little old song go, which, under pretence of being cheerful, is by far the most lugubrious I ever heard in my life?

'Away with melancholy,
Nor doleful changes ring
On life and human folly,
But merrily merrily sing
Fal la!'

Don't let me sing Fal la, my dear Mortimer (which is comparatively unmeaning), but let us sing that we give up guessing the riddle altogether."

"Are you in communication with this girl, Eugene, and is what these people say true?"

"I concede both admissions to my honourable and learned friend."

"Then what is to come of it? What are you doing? Where are you going?"

"My dear Mortimer, one would think the schoolmaster had left behind him a catechising infection. You are ruffled by the want of another cigar. Take one of these, I entreat. Light it at mine, which is in perfect order. So! Now do me the justice to observe that I am doing all I can towards self-improvement, and that you have a light thrown on those household implements which, when you only saw them as in a glass darkly, you were hastily — I must say hastily — inclined to depreciate. Sensible of my deficiencies, I have surrounded myself with moral influences expressly meant to promote the formation of the domestic virtues. To those influences, and to the improving society of my friends from boyhood, commend me with your best wishes."

"Ah, Eugene!" said Lightwood affectionately, now standing near him, so that they both stood in one little cloud of smoke; "I would that you answered my three questions! What is to come of it? What are you doing? Where are you going?"

"And my dear Mortimer," returned Eugene, lightly fanning away the smoke with his hand for the better exposition of his frankness of face and manner, "believe me, I would answer them instantly if I could. But to enable me to do so, I must first have found out the troublesome conundrum long abandoned. Here it is. Eugene Wrayburn." Tapping his forehead and breast. "Riddle-me, riddle-me-ree, perhaps you can't tell me what this may be? — No, upon my life I can't. I give it up!"

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH A FRIENDLY MOVE IS ORIGINATED

THE arrangement between Mr. Boffin and his literary man, Mr. Silas Wegg, so far altered with the altered habits of Mr. Boffin's life, as that the Roman Empire usually declined in the morning and in the eminently aristocratic family mansion, rather than in the evening, as of yore, and in Boffin's Bower. There were occasions, however, when Mr. Boffin, seeking a brief refuge from the blandishments of fashion, would present himself at the Bower after dark, to anticipate the next sallying forth of Wegg, and would there, on the old settle, pursue the downward fortunes of those enervated and corrupted masters of the world who were by this time on their last legs. If Wegg had been worse paid for his office, or better qualified to discharge it, he would have considered these visits complimentary and agreeable; but, holding the position of a handsomely remunerated humbug, he resented them. This was quite according to rule, for the incompetent servant, by whomsoever employed, is always against his employer. Even those born governors, noble and right honourable creatures, who have been the most imbecile in high place, have uniformly shown themselves the most opposed (sometimes in belying distrust, sometimes in vapid insolence) to *their* employer. What is in such wise true of the public master and servant is equally true of the private master and servant all the world over.

When Mr. Silas Wegg did at last obtain free access to "Our House," as he had been wont to call the mansion outside which he had sat shelterless so long, and when he did at last find it in all particulars as different from his mental plans of it as according to the nature of things it well could be, that far-seeing and far-reaching character, by way of asserting himself and making out a case for compensation, affected to fall into a melancholy strain of musing over the mournful past; as if the house and he had had a fall in life together.

"And this, sir," Silas would say to his patron, sadly nodding his head and musing, "was once Our House! This, sir, is the building from which I have so often seen those great creatures, Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker" — whose very names were of his own inventing — "pass and repass! And has it come to this, indeed! Ah, dear me, dear me!"

So tender were his lamentations, that the kindly Mr. Boffin was quite sorry for him, and almost felt mistrustful that in buying the house he had done him an irreparable injury.

Two or three diplomatic interviews, the result of great subtlety on Mr. Wegg's part, but assuming the mask of careless yielding to a fortuitous combination of circumstances impelling him towards Clerkenwell, had enabled him to complete his bargain with Mr. Venus.

"Bring me round to the Bower," said Silas, when the bargain was closed, "next Saturday evening, and if a sociable glass of old Jamaikey warm should meet your views, I am not the man to begrudge it."

"You are aware of my being poor company, sir," replied Mr. Venus, "but be it so."

It being so, here is Saturday evening come, and here is Mr. Venus come, and ringing at the Bower gate.

Mr. Wegg opens the gate, descries a sort of brown paper truncheon under Mr. Venus's arm, and remarks, in a dry tone: "Oh! I thought perhaps you might have come in a cab."

"No, Mr. Wegg," replies Venus. "I am not above a parcel."

"Above a parcel! No!" says Wegg, with some dissatisfaction. But does not openly growl, "A certain sort of parcel might be above you."

"Here is your purchase, Mr. Wegg," says Venus, politely handing it over, "and I am glad to restore it to the source from whence it — flowed."

"Thankee," says Wegg. "Now this affair is concluded, I may mention to you in a friendly way that I 've my doubts whether, if I had consulted a lawyer, you could have kept this article back from me. I only throw it out as a legal point."

"Do you think so, Mr. Wegg? I bought you in open contract."

"You can't buy human flesh and blood in this country, sir;

not alive, you can't," says Wegg, shaking his head. "Then query, bone?"

"As a legal point?" asks Venus.

"As a legal point."

"I am not competent to speak upon that, Mr. Wegg," says Venus, reddening and growing something louder; "but upon a point of fact I think myself competent to speak; and as a point of fact I would have seen you — will you allow me to say, further?"

"I would n't say more than further, if I was you," Mr. Wegg suggests pacifically.

"— Before I 'd have given that packet into your hand without being paid my price for it. I don't pretend to know how the point of law may stand, but I 'm thoroughly confident upon the point of fact."

As Mr. Venus is irritable (no doubt owing to his disappointment in love), and as it is not the cue of Mr. Wegg to have him out of temper, the latter gentleman soothingly remarks, "I only put it as a little case; I only put it ha'porthetically."

"Then I 'd rather, Mr. Wegg, you put it another time, penn'orthetically," is Mr. Venus's retort, "for I tell you candidly I don't like your little cases."

Arrived by this time in Mr. Wegg's sitting-room, made bright on the chilly evening by gaslight and fire, Mr. Venus softens and compliments him on his abode; profiting by the occasion to remind Wegg that he (Venus) told him he had got into a good thing.

"Tolerable," Wegg rejoins. "But bear in mind, Mr. Venus, that there 's no gold without its alloy. Mix for yourself and take a seat in the chimbley-corner. Will you perform upon a pipe, sir?"

"I am but an indifferent performer, sir," returns the other; "but I 'll accompany you with a whiff or two at intervals."

So Mr. Venus mixes, and Wegg mixes; and Mr. Venus lights and puffs, and Wegg lights and puffs.

"And there 's alloy even in this metal of yours, Mr. Wegg, you was remarking?"

"Mystery," returns Wegg. "I don't like it, Mr. Venus. I don't like to have the life knocked out of former inhabitants of this house, in the gloomy dark, and not know who did it."

"Might you have any suspicions, Mr. Wegg?"

"No," returns that gentleman. "I know who profits by it. But I've no suspicions."

Having said which, Mr. Wegg smokes and looks at the fire with a most determined expression of Charity; as if he had caught that cardinal virtue by the skirts as she felt it her painful duty to depart from him, and held her by main force.

"Similarly," resumes Wegg, "I have observations as I can offer upon certain points and parties; but I make no objections, Mr. Venus. Here is an immense fortune drops from the clouds upon a person that shall be nameless. Here is a weekly allowance, with a certain weight of coals, drops from the clouds upon me. Which of us is the better man? Not the person that shall be nameless. That's an observation of mine, but I don't make it an objection. I take my allowance and my certain weight of coals. He takes his fortune. That's the way it works."

"It would be a good thing for me, if I could see things in the calm light you do, Mr. Wegg."

"Again look here," pursues Silas, with an oratorical flourish of his pipe and his wooden leg; the latter having an undignified tendency to tilt him back in his chair; "here's another observation, Mr. Venus, unaccompanied with an objection. Him that shall be nameless is liable to be talked over. He gets talked over. Him that shall be nameless, having me at his right hand, naturally looking to be promoted higher, and you may perhaps say meriting to be promoted higher—"

(Mr. Venus murmurs that he does say so.)

"—Him that shall be nameless, under such circumstances passes me by, and puts a talking-over stranger above my head. Which of us two is the better man? Which of us two can repeat most poetry? Which of us two has, in the service of him that shall be nameless, tackled the Romans, both civil and military, till he has got as husky as if he'd been weaned and ever since brought up on sawdust? Not the talking-over stranger. Yet the house is as free to him as if it was his, and he has his room, and is put upon a footing, and draws about a thousand a year. I am banished to the Bower, to be found in it like a piece of furniture whenever wanted. Merit, therefore, don't win. That's the way it works. I observe it, because I can't help observing it, being accustomed to take a powerful sight of notice; but I don't object. Ever here before, Mr. Venus?"

"Not inside the gate, Mr. Wegg."

"You've been as far as the gate then, Mr. Venus?"

"Yes, Mr. Wegg, and peeped in from curiosity."

"Did you see anything?"

"Nothing but the dustyard."

Mr. Wegg rolls his eyes all round the room, in that ever unsatisfied quest of his, and then rolls his eyes all round Mr. Venus; as if suspicious of his having something about him to be found out.

"And yet, sir," he pursues, "being acquainted with old Mr. Harmon, one would have thought it might have been polite in you, too, to give him a call. And you're naturally of a polite disposition, you are." This last clause as a softening compliment to Mr. Venus.

"It is true, sir," replies Venus, winking his weak eyes, and running his fingers through his dusty shock of hair, "that I was so, before a certain observation soured me. You understand to what I allude, Mr. Wegg? To a certain written statement respecting not wishing to be regarded in a certain light. Since that, all is fled, save gall."

"Not all," says Mr. Wegg, in a tone of sentimental condolence.

"Yes, sir," returns Venus, "all! The world may deem it harsh, but I'd quite as soon pitch into my best friend, as not. Indeed, I'd sooner!"

Involuntarily making a pass with his wooden leg to guard himself as Mr. Venus springs up in the emphasis of this unsociable declaration, Mr. Wegg tilts over on his back, chair and all, and is rescued by that harmless misanthrope, in a disjointed state and ruefully rubbing his head.

"Why, you lost your balance, Mr. Wegg," says Venus, handing him his pipe.

"And about time to do it," grumbles Silas, "when a man's visitors, without a word of notice, conduct themselves with the sudden wiciousness of Jacks-in-boxes! Don't come flying out of your chair like that, Mr. Venus!"

"I ask your pardon, Mr. Wegg. I am so soured."

"Yes, but hang it," says Wegg argumentatively, "a well-governed mind can be soured sitting! And as to being regarded in lights, there's bumpy lights as well as bony. *In* which," again rubbing his head, "I object to regard myself."

"I'll bear it in memory, sir."

"If you'll be so good." Mr. Wegg slowly subdues his ironical tone and his lingering irritation, and resumes his pipe. "We were talking of old Mr. Harmon being a friend of yours."

"Not a friend, Mr. Wegg. Only known to speak to, and to have a little deal with now and then. A very inquisitive character, Mr. Wegg, regarding what was found in the dust. As inquisitive as secret."

"Ah! You found him secret?" returns Wegg, with a greedy relish.

"He had always the look of it, and the manner of it."

"Ah!" with another roll of his eyes. "As to what was found in the dust now. Did you ever hear him mention how he found it, my dear friend? Living on the mysterious premises, one would like to know. For instance, where he found things? Or, for instance, how he set about it? Whether he began at the top of the mounds, or whether he began at the bottom. Whether he prodded," — Mr. Wegg's pantomime is skilful and expressive here, — "or whether he scooped? Should you say scooped, my dear Mr. Venus; or should you — as a man — say prodded?"

"I should say neither, Mr. Wegg."

"As a fellow-man, Mr. Venus — mix again — why neither?"

"Because, I suppose, sir, that what was found, was found in the sorting and sifting. All the mounds are sorted and sifted?"

"You shall see 'em and pass your opinion. Mix again?"

On each occasion of his saying "mix again," Mr. Wegg, with a hop on his wooden leg, hitches his chair a little nearer; more as if he were proposing that himself and Mr. Venus should mix again, than that they should replenish their glasses.

"Living (as I said before) on the mysterious premises," says Wegg when the other has acted on his hospitable entreaty, "one likes to know. Would you be inclined to say now — as a brother — that he ever hid things in the dust, as well as found 'em?"

"Mr. Wegg, on the whole I should say he might."

Mr. Wegg claps on his spectacles, and admiringly surveys Mr. Venus from head to foot.

"As a mortal equally with myself, whose hand I take in mine for the first time this day, having accountably overlooked that act so full of boundless confidence binding a fellow-creetur *to* a fellow-creetur," says Wegg, holding Mr. Venus's palm out, flat and ready for smiting, and now smiting it; "as such — and no other — for I scorn all lowlier ties betwixt myself and the man walking with his face erect that alone I call my Twin — regarded and regarding in this trustful bond — what do you think he might have hid?"

"It is but a supposition, Mr. Wegg."

"As a Being with his hand upon his heart," cries Wegg, — and the apostrophe is not the less impressive for the Being's hand being actually upon his rum and water, — "put your supposition into language, and bring it out, Mr. Venus!"

"He was the species of old gentleman, sir," slowly returns that practical anatomist, after drinking, "that I should judge likely to take such opportunities as this place offered, of stowing away money, valuables, maybe papers."

"As one that was ever an ornament of human life," says Mr. Wegg, again holding out Mr. Venus's palm as if it were going to tell his fortune by chiromancy, and holding his own up ready for smiting it when the time should come — "as one that the poet might have had his eye on, in writing the national naval words: —

> Helm a-weather, now lay her close,
> Yard arm and yard arm she lies;
> Again, cried I, Mr. Venus, give her t' other dose,
> Man shrouds and grapple, sir, or she flies!

— that is to say, regarded in the light of true British Oak, for such you are — explain, Mr. Venus, the expression 'papers'!"

"Seeing that the old gentleman was generally cutting off some near relation, or blocking out some natural affection," Mr. Venus rejoins, "he most likely made a good many wills and codicils."

The palm of Silas Wegg descends with a sounding smack upon the palm of Venus, and Wegg lavishly exclaims, "Twin in opinion equally with feeling! Mix a little more!"

Having now hitched his wooden leg and his chair close in front of Mr. Venus, Mr. Wegg rapidly mixes for both, gives his visitor his glass, touches its rim with the rim of his own, puts

his own to his lips, puts it down, and spreading his hands on his visitor's knees, thus addresses him: —

"Mr. Venus. It ain't that I object to being passed over for a stranger, though I regard the stranger as a more than doubtful customer. It ain't for the sake of making money, though money is ever welcome. It ain't for myself, though I am not so haughty as to be above doing myself a good turn. It 's for the cause of the right."

Mr. Venus, passively winking his weak eyes both at once, demands: "What is, Mr. Wegg?"

"The friendly move, sir, that I now propose. You see the move, sir?"

"Till you have pointed it out, Mr. Wegg, I can't say whether I do or not."

"If there *is* anything to be found on these premises, let us find it together. Let us make the friendly move of agreeing to look for it together. Let us make the friendly move of agreeing to share the profits of it equally betwixt us. In the cause of the right." Thus Silas, assuming a noble air.

"Then," says Mr. Venus, looking up, after meditating with his hair held in his hands, as if he could only fix his attention by fixing his head; "if anything was to be unburied from under the dust, it would be kept a secret by you and me? Would that be it, Mr. Wegg?"

"That would depend upon what it was, Mr. Venus. Say it was money, or plate, or jewellery, it would be as much ours as anybody else's."

Mr. Venus rubs an eyebrow interrogatively.

"In the cause of the right it would. Because it would be unknowingly sold with the mounds else, and the buyer would get what he was never meant to have, and never bought. And what would that be, Mr. Venus, but the cause of the wrong?"

"Say it was papers?" Mr. Venus propounds.

"According to what they contained we should offer to dispose of 'em to the parties most interested," replied Wegg promptly.

"In the cause of the right, Mr. Wegg?"

"Always so, Mr. Venus. If the parties should use them in the cause of the wrong, that would be their act and deed. Mr. Venus, I have an opinion of you, sir, to which it is not easy to give mouth. Since I called upon you that evening when you

were, as I may say, floating your powerful mind in tea, I have felt that you required to be roused with an object. In this friendly move, sir, you will have a glorious object to rouse you."

Mr. Wegg then goes on to enlarge upon what throughout has been uppermost in his crafty mind, — the qualifications of Mr. Venus for such a search. He expatiates on Mr. Venus's patient habits and delicate manipulation; on his skill in piecing little things together; on his knowledge of various tissues and textures; on the likelihood of small indications leading him on to the discovery of great concealments. "While as to myself," says Wegg, "I am not good at it. Whether I gave myself up to prodding, or whether I gave myself up to scooping, I could n't do it with that delicate touch so as not to show that I was disturbing the mounds. Quite different with *you*, going to work (as *you* would) in the light of a fellow-man, holily pledged in a friendly move to his brother man." Mr. Wegg next modestly remarks on the want of adaptation in a wooden leg to ladders and such like airy perches, and also hints at an inherent tendency in that timber fiction, when called into action for the purposes of a promenade on an ashy slope, to stick itself into the yielding foothold, and peg its owner to one spot. Then, leaving this part of the subject, he remarks on the special phenomenon that, before his installation in the Bower, it was from Mr. Venus that he first heard of the legend of hidden wealth in the Mounds; "which," he observes with a vaguely pious air, "was surely never meant for nothing." Lastly, he returns to the cause of the right, gloomily foreshadowing the possibility of something being unearthed to criminate Mr. Boffin (of whom he once more candidly admits it cannot be denied that he profits by a murder), and anticipating his denunciation by the friendly movers to avenging justice. And this, Mr. Wegg expressly points out, not at all for the sake of the reward — though it would be a want of principle not to take it.

To all this, Mr. Venus, with his shock of dusty hair cocked after the manner of a terrier's ears, attends profoundly. When Mr. Wegg, having finished, opens his arms wide, as if to show Mr. Venus how bare his breast is, and then folds them pending a reply, Mr. Venus winks at him with both eyes some little time before speaking.

"I see you have tried it by yourself, Mr. Wegg," he says

when he does speak. "You have found out the difficulties by experience."

"No, it can hardly be said that I have tried it," replies Wegg, a little dashed by the hint. "I have just skimmed it — skimmed it."

"And found nothing besides the difficulties?"

Wegg shakes his head.

"I scarcely know what to say to this, Mr. Wegg," observes Venus, after ruminating for a while.

"Say yes," Wegg naturally urges.

"If I was n't soured, my answer would be no. But being soured, Mr. Wegg, and driven to reckless madness and desperation, I suppose it 's yes."

Wegg joyfully reproduces the two glasses, repeats the ceremony of clinking their rims, and inwardly drinks with great heartiness to the health and success in life of the young lady who has reduced Mr. Venus to his present convenient state of mind.

The articles of the friendly move are then severally recited and agreed upon. They are but secrecy, fidelity, and perseverance. The Bower to be always free of access to Mr. Venus for his researches, and every precaution to be taken against their attracting observation in the neighbourhood.

"There 's a footstep!" exclaims Venus.

"Where?" cries Wegg starting.

"Outside. St!"

They are in the act of ratifying the treaty of friendly move, by shaking hands upon it. They softly break off, light their pipes which have gone out, and lean back in their chairs. No doubt, a footstep. It approaches the window, and a hand taps at the glass. "Come in!" calls Wegg; meaning come round by the door. But the heavy old-fashioned sash is slowly raised, and a head slowly looks in out of the dark background of night.

"Pray is Mr. Silas Wegg here? Oh! I see him!"

The friendly movers might not have been quite at their ease, even though the visitor had entered in the usual manner. But leaning on the breast-high window, and staring in out of the darkness, they find the visitor extremely embarrassing. Especially Mr. Venus, who removes his pipe, draws back his head, and stares at the starer, as if it were his own Hindoo baby come to fetch him home.

"Good evening, Mr. Wegg. The yard gate lock should be looked to, if you please; it don't catch."

"Is it Mr. Rokesmith?" falters Wegg.

"It is Mr. Rokesmith. Don't let me disturb you. I am not coming in. I have only a message for you, which I undertook to deliver on my way home to my lodgings. I was in two minds about coming beyond the gate without ringing, not knowing but you might have a dog about."

"I wish I had," mutters Wegg, with his back turned as he rose from his chair. "St! Hush! The talking-over stranger, Mr. Venus."

"Is that any one I know?" inquires the staring Secretary.

"No, Mr. Rokesmith. Friend of mine. Passing the evening with me."

"Oh! I beg his pardon. Mr. Boffin wishes you to know that he does not expect you to stay at home any evening, on the chance of his coming. It has occurred to him that he may, without intending it, have been a tie upon you. In future, if he should come without notice, he will take his chance of finding you, and it will be all the same to him if he does not. I undertook to tell you on my way. That's all."

With that, and "Good night," the Secretary lowers the window, and disappears. They listen and hear his footsteps go back to the gate, and hear the gate close after him.

"And for that individual, Mr. Venus," remarks Wegg when he is fully gone, "*I* have been passed over! Let me ask you what you think of him?"

Apparently Mr. Venus does not know what to think of him, for he makes sundry efforts to reply, without delivering himself of any other articulate utterance than that he has "a singular look."

"A double look, you mean, sir," rejoins Wegg, playing bitterly upon the word. "That's *his* look. Any amount of singular look for me, but not a double look! That's an underhanded mind, sir."

"Do you say there's something against him?" Venus asks.

"Something against him?" repeats Wegg. "Something? What would the relief be to my feelings — as a fellow-man — if I was n't the slave of truth, and did n't feel myself compelled to answer, Everything!"

See into what wonderful maudlin refuges featherless ostriches

plunge their heads! It is such unspeakable moral compensation to Wegg to be overcome by the consideration that Mr. Rokesmith has an underhanded mind!

"On this starlight night, Mr. Venus," he remarks, when he is showing that friendly mover out across the yard, and both are something the worse for mixing again and again — "on this starlight night to think that talking-over strangers, and underhanded minds, can go walking home under the sky, as if they was all square!"

"The spectacle of those orbs," says Mr. Venus, gazing upward with his hat tumbling off, "brings heavy on me her crushing words that she did not wish to regard herself nor yet to be regarded in that —"

"I know! I know! You need n't repeat 'em," says Wegg, pressing his hand. "But think how those stars steady me in the cause of the right against some that shall be nameless. It is n't that I bear malice. But see how they glisten with old remembrances! Old remembrances of what, sir?"

Mr. Venus begins drearily replying, "Of her words, in her own handwriting, that she does not wish to regard herself, nor yet —" when Silas cuts him short with dignity.

"No, sir! Remembrances of Our House, of Master George, of Aunt Jane, of Uncle Parker, all laid waste! All offered up sacrifices to the minion of fortune and the worm of the hour!"

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH AN INNOCENT ELOPEMENT OCCURS

THE minion of fortune and the worm of the hour, or, in less cutting language, Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, the Golden Dustman, had become as much at home in his eminently aristocratic family mansion as he was likely ever to be. He could not but feel that, like an eminently aristocratic family cheese, it was much too large for his wants, and bred an infinite amount of parasites; but he was content to regard this drawback on his property as a sort of perpetual Legacy Duty. He felt the more resigned to it, forasmuch as Mrs. Boffin enjoyed herself completely, and Miss Bella was delighted.

That young lady was, no doubt, an acquisition to the Boffins. She was far too pretty to be unattractive anywhere, and far too quick of perception to be below the tone of her new career. Whether it improved her heart might be a matter of taste that was open to question; but as touching another matter of taste, its improvement of her appearance and manner, there could be no question whatever.

And thus it soon came about that Miss Bella began to set Mrs. Boffin right; and even further, that Miss Bella began to feel ill at ease, and as it were responsible, when she saw Mrs. Boffin going wrong. Not that so sweet a disposition and so sound a nature could ever go very wrong even among the great visiting authorities who agreed that the Boffins were "charmingly vulgar" (which for certain was not their own case in saying so), but that when she made a slip on the social ice on which all the children of Podsnappery, with genteel souls to be saved, are required to skate in circles, or to slide in long rows, she inevitably tripped Miss Bella up (so that young lady felt), and caused her to experience great confusion under the glances of the more skilful performers engaged in those ice-exercises.

At Miss Bella's time of life it was not to be expected that she should examine herself very closely on the congruity or

stability of her position in Mr. Boffin's house. And as she had never been sparing of complaints of her old home when she had no other to compare it with, so there was no novelty of ingratitude or disdain in her very much preferring her new one.

"An invaluable man is Rokesmith," said Mr. Boffin, after some two or three months. "But I can't quite make him out."

Neither could Bella, so she found the subject rather interesting.

"He takes more care of my affairs, morning, noon, and night," said Mr. Boffin, "than fifty other men put together either could or would; and yet he has ways of his own that are like tying a scaffolding-pole right across the road, and bringing me up short when I am almost a walking arm in arm with him."

"May I ask how so, sir?" inquired Bella.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Boffin, "he won't meet any company here but you. When we have visitors, I should wish him to have his regular place at the table like ourselves; but no, he won't take it."

"If he considers himself above it," said Miss Bella, with an airy toss of her head, "I should leave him alone."

"It ain't that, my dear," replied Mr. Boffin, thinking it over. "He don't consider himself above it."

"Perhaps he considers himself beneath it," suggested Bella. "If so, he ought to know best."

"No, my dear; nor it ain't that, neither. No," repeated Mr. Boffin, with a shake of his head, after again thinking it over; "Rokesmith's a modest man, but he don't consider himself beneath it."

"Then what does he consider, sir?" asked Bella.

"Dashed if I know!" said Mr. Boffin. "It seemed at first as if it was only Lightwood that he objected to meet. And now it seems to be everybody except you."

"Oho!" thought Miss Bella. "Indeed! *That*'s it, is it!" For Mr. Mortimer Lightwood had dined there two or three times, and she had met him elsewhere, and he had shown her some attention. "Rather cool in a Secretary — and pa's lodger — to make me the subject of his jealousy!"

That pa's daughter should be so contemptuous of pa's lodger was odd; but there were odder anomalies than that in the mind of the spoilt girl — the doubly spoilt girl; spoilt first by

poverty, and then by wealth. Be it this history's part, however, to leave them to unravel themselves.

"A little too much, I think," Miss Bella reflected scornfully, "to have pa's lodger laying claim to me, and keeping eligible people off! A little too much, indeed, to have the opportunities opened to me by Mr. and Mrs. Boffin appropriated by a mere Secretary and pa's lodger!"

Yet it was not so very long ago that Bella had been fluttered by the discovery that this same Secretary and lodger seemed to like her. Ah! but the eminently aristocratic mansion and Mrs. Boffin's dressmaker had not come into play then.

In spite of his seemingly retiring manners a very intrusive person, this Secretary and lodger, in Miss Bella's opinion. Always a light in his office-room when we came home from the play or opera, and he always at the carriage door to hand us out. Always a provoking radiance, too, on Mrs. Boffin's face, and an abominably cheerful reception of him, as if it were possible seriously to approve what the man had in his mind!

"You never charge me, Miss Wilfer," said the Secretary, encountering her by chance alone in the great drawing-room, "with commissions for home. I shall always be happy to execute any commands you may have in that direction."

"Pray what may you mean, Mr. Rokesmith?" inquired Miss Bella, with languidly drooping eyelids.

"By home? I mean your father's house at Holloway."

She coloured under the retort — so skilfully thrust that the words seemed to be merely a plain answer, given in plain good faith — and said, rather more emphatically and sharply: —

"What commissions and commands are you speaking of?"

"Only such little words of remembrance as I assume you send somehow or other," replied the Secretary, with his former air. "It would be a pleasure to me if you would make me the bearer of them. As you know, I come and go between the two houses every day."

"You need n't remind me of that, sir."

She was too quick in this petulant sally against "pa 's lodger;" and she felt that she had been so when she met his quiet look.

"They don't send many — what was your expression? — words of remembrance to *me*," said Bella, making haste to take refuge in ill-usage.

"They frequently ask me about you, and I give them such slight intelligence as I can."

"I hope it's truly given," exclaimed Bella.

"I hope you cannot doubt it, for it would be very much against you, if you could."

"No, I do not doubt it. I deserve the reproach, which is very just, indeed. I beg your pardon, Mr. Rokesmith."

"I should beg you not to do so, but that it shows you to such admirable advantage," he replied with earnestness. "Forgive me; I could not help saying that. To return to what I have digressed from, let me add that perhaps they think I report them to you, deliver little messages, and the like. But I forbear to trouble you, as you never ask me."

"I am going, sir," said Bella, looking at him as if he had reproved her, "to see them to-morrow."

"Is that," he asked, hesitating, "said to me or to them?"

"To which you please."

"To both? Shall I make it a message?"

"You can if you like, Mr. Rokesmith. Message or no message, I am going to see them to-morrow."

"Then I will tell them so."

He lingered a moment, as though to give her the opportunity of prolonging the conversation if she wished. As she remained silent, he left her. Two incidents of the little interview were felt by Miss Bella herself, when alone again, to be very curious. The first was that he unquestionably left her with a penitent air upon her, and a penitent feeling in her heart. The second was that she had not had an intention or a thought of going home until she had announced it to him as a settled design.

"What can I mean by it, or what can he mean by it?" was her mental inquiry — "he has no right to any power over me, and how do I come to mind him when I don't care for him?"

Mrs. Boffin insisting that Bella should make to-morrow's expedition in the chariot, she went home in great grandeur. Mrs. Wilfer and Miss Lavinia had speculated much on the probabilities and improbabilities of her coming in this gorgeous state, and, on beholding the chariot from the window at which they were secreted to look out for it, agreed that it must be detained at the door as long as possible, for the mortification and confusion of the neighbours. Then they repaired to the

usual family room, to receive Miss Bella with a becoming show of indifference.

The family room looked very small and very mean, and the downward staircase by which it was attained looked very narrow and very crooked. The little house and all its arrangements were a poor contrast to the eminently aristocratic dwelling. "I can hardly believe," thought Bella, "that I ever did endure life in this place!"

Gloomy majesty on the part of Mrs. Wilfer, and native pertness on the part of Lavvy, did not mend the matter. Bella really stood in natural need of a little help, and she got none.

"This," said Mrs. Wilfer, presenting a cheek to be kissed, as sympathetic and responsive as the back of the bowl of a spoon, "is quite an honour! You will probably find your sister Lavvy grown, Bella."

"Ma," Miss Lavinia interposed, "there can be no objection to your being aggravating, because Bella richly deserves it; but I really must request that you will not drag in such ridiculous nonsense as my having grown when I am past the growing age."

"I grew myself," Mrs. Wilfer sternly proclaimed, "after I was married."

"Very well, ma," returned Lavvy, "then I think you had much better have left it alone."

The lofty glare with which the majestic woman received this answer might have embarrassed a less pert opponent, but it had no effect upon Lavinia; who, leaving her parent to the enjoyment of any amount of glaring that she might deem desirable under the circumstances, accosted her sister, undismayed.

"I suppose you won't consider yourself quite disgraced, Bella, if I give you a kiss? Well! And how do you do, Bella? And how are your Boffins?"

"Peace!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilfer. "Hold! I will not suffer this tone of levity."

"My goodness me! How are your Spoffins, then?" said Lavvy, "since ma so very much objects to your Boffins."

"Impertinent girl! Minx!" said Mrs. Wilfer, with dread severity.

"I don't care whether I am a Minx or a Sphinx," returned Lavinia, coolly tossing her head; "it's exactly the same thing to me, and I'd every bit as soon be one as the other; but I know this — I'll not grow after I am married!"

"You will not? *You* will not?" repeated Mrs. Wilfer solemnly.

"No, ma, I will not. Nothing shall induce me."

Mrs. Wilfer, having waved her gloves, became loftily pathetic. "But it was to be expected;" thus she spake. "A child of mine deserts me for the proud and prosperous, and another child of mine despises me. It is quite fitting."

"Ma," Bella struck in, "Mr. and Mrs. Boffin are prosperous, no doubt; but you have no right to say they are proud. You must know very well that they are not."

"In short, ma," said Lavvy, bouncing over to the enemy without a word of notice, "you must know very well — or if you don't, more shame for you! — that Mr. and Mrs. Boffin are just absolute perfection."

"Truly," returned Mrs. Wilfer, courteously receiving the deserter, "it would seem that we are required to think so. And this, Lavinia, is my reason for objecting to a tone of levity. Mrs. Boffin (of whose physiognomy I can never speak with the composure I would desire to preserve) and your mother are not on terms of intimacy. It is not for a moment to be supposed that she and her husband dare to presume to speak of this family as the Wilfers. I cannot therefore condescend to speak of them as the Boffins. No; for such a tone — call it familiarity, levity, equality, or what you will — would imply those social interchanges which do not exist. Do I render myself intelligible?"

Without taking the least notice of this inquiry, albeit delivered in an imposing and forensic manner, Lavinia reminded her sister, "After all, you know, Bella, you have n't told us how your Whatshisnames are."

"I don't want to speak of them here," replied Bella, suppressing indignation, and tapping her foot on the floor. "They are much too kind and too good to be drawn into these discussions."

"Why put it so?" demanded Mrs. Wilfer, with biting sarcasm. "Why adopt a circuitous form of speech? It is polite and it is obliging; but why do it? Why not openly say that they are much too kind and too good for *us?* We understand the allusion. Why disguise the phrase?"

"Ma," said Bella, with one beat of her foot, "you are enough to drive a saint mad, and so is Lavvy."

"Unfortunate Lavvy!" cried Mrs. Wilfer, in a tone of commiseration. "She always comes in for it. My poor child!" But Lavvy, with the suddenness of her former desertion, now bounced over to the other enemy, very sharply remarking, "Don't patronise *me*, ma, because I can take care of myself."

"I only wonder," resumed Mrs. Wilfer, directing her observations to her elder daughter, as safer on the whole than her utterly unmanageable younger, "that you find time and inclination to tear yourself from Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, and come to see us at all. I only wonder that our claims, contending against the superior claims of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, had any weight. I feel I ought to be thankful for gaining so much, in competition with Mr. and Mrs. Boffin." (The good lady bitterly emphasised the first letter of the word Boffin, as if it represented her chief objection to the owners of that name, and as if she could have borne Doffin, Moffin, or Poffin much better.)

"Ma," said Bella angrily, "you force me to say that I am truly sorry I did come home, and that I never will come home again, except when poor dear pa is here. For pa is too magnanimous to feel envy and spite towards my generous friends, and pa is delicate enough and gentle enough to remember the sort of little claim they thought I had upon them and the unusually trying position in which, through no act of my own, I had been placed. And I always did love poor dear pa better than all the rest of you put together, and I always do and I always shall!"

Here Bella, deriving no comfort from her charming bonnet and her elegant dress, burst into tears.

"I think, R. W.," cried Mrs. Wilfer, lifting up her eyes and apostrophising the air, "that if you were present it would be a trial to your feelings to hear your wife and the mother of your family depreciated in your name. But Fate has spared you this, R. W., whatever it may have thought proper to inflict upon her!"

Here Mrs. Wilfer burst into tears.

"I hate the Boffins!" protested Miss Lavinia. "I don't care who objects to their being called the Boffins. I WILL call 'em the Boffins. The Boffins, the Boffins, the Boffins! And I say they are mischief-making Boffins, and I say the Boffins have set Bella against me, and I tell the Boffins to their faces" — which

was not strictly the fact, but the young lady was excited — "that they are detestable Boffins, disreputable Boffins, odious Boffins, beastly Boffins. There!"

Here Miss Lavinia burst into tears.

The front garden gate clanked, and the Secretary was seen coming at a brisk pace up the steps. "Leave Me to open the door to him," said Mrs. Wilfer, rising with stately resignation as she shook her head and dried her eyes; "we have at present no stipendiary girl to do so. We have nothing to conceal. If he sees these traces of emotion on our cheeks, let him construe them as he may."

With those words she stalked out. In a few moments she stalked in again, proclaiming in her heraldic manner, "Mr. Rokesmith is the bearer of a packet for Miss Bella Wilfer."

Mr. Rokesmith followed close upon his name, and of course saw what was amiss. But he discreetly affected to see nothing, and addressed Miss Bella.

"Mr. Boffin intended to have placed this in the carriage for you this morning. He wished you to have it, as a little keepsake he had prepared — it is only a purse, Miss Wilfer — but as he was disappointed in his fancy, I volunteered to come after you with it."

Bella took it in her hand, and thanked him.

"We have been quarrelling here a little, Mr. Rokesmith, but not more than we used; you know our agreeable ways among ourselves. You find me just going. Good-bye, mamma. Good-bye, Lavvy!" And with a kiss for each Miss Bella turned to the door. The Secretary would have attended her, but Mrs. Wilfer advancing and saying with dignity, "Pardon me! Permit me to assert my natural right to escort my child to the equipage which is in waiting for her," he begged pardon and gave place. It was a very magnificent spectacle indeed, to see Mrs. Wilfer throw open the house door, and loudly demand with extended gloves, "The male domestic of Mrs. Boffin!" To whom presenting himself, she delivered the brief but majestic charge, "Miss Wilfer. Coming out!" and so delivered her over, like a female Lieutenant of the Tower relinquishing a State Prisoner. The effect of this ceremonial was for some quarter of an hour afterwards perfectly paralysing on the neighbours, and was much enhanced by the worthy lady airing herself for that term in a kind of splendidly serene trance on the top step.

When Bella was seated in the carriage, she opened the little packet in her hand. It contained a pretty purse, and the purse contained a bank-note for fifty pounds. "This shall be a joyful surprise for poor dear pa," said Bella, "and I'll take it myself into the City!"

As she was uninformed respecting the exact locality of the place of business of Chicksey, Veneering and Stobbles, but knew it to be near Mincing Lane, she directed herself to be driven to the corner of that darksome spot. Thence she despatched "the male domestic of Mrs. Boffin," in search of the counting-house of Chicksey, Veneering and Stobbles, with a message importing that if R. Wilfer could come out there was a lady waiting who would be glad to speak with him. The delivery of these mysterious words from the mouth of a footman caused so great an excitement in the counting-house that a youthful scout was instantly appointed to follow Rumty, observe the lady, and come in with his report. Nor was the agitation by any means diminished when the scout rushed back with the intelligence that the lady was "a slap-up gal in a bang-up chariot."

Rumty himself, with his pen behind his ear under his rusty hat, arrived at the carriage door in a breathless condition, and had been fairly lugged into the vehicle by his cravat, and embraced almost unto choking, before he recognised his daughter. "My dear child!" he then panted incoherently. "Good gracious me! What a lovely woman you are! I thought you had been unkind and forgotten your mother and sister."

"I have just been to see them, pa dear."

"Oh! and how — how did you find your mother?" asked R. W. dubiously.

"Very disagreeable, pa, and so was Lavvy."

"They are sometimes a little liable to it," observed the patient cherub; "but I hope you made allowances, Bella, my dear?"

"No. I was disagreeable, too, pa; we were all of us disagreeable together. But I want you to come and dine with me somewhere, pa."

"Why, my dear, I have already partaken of a — if one might mention such an article in this superb chariot — of a — Saveloy," replied R. Wilfer, modestly dropping his voice on the word, as he eyed the canary-coloured fittings.

"Oh! That's nothing, pa!"

"Truly, it ain't as much as one could sometimes wish it to

be, my dear," he admitted, drawing his hand across his mouth. "Still, when circumstances over which you have no control interpose obstacles between yourself and Small Germans, you can't do better than bring a contented mind to bear on" — again dropping his voice in deference to the chariot — "Saveloys!"

"You poor good pa! Pa, do, I beg and pray, get leave for the rest of the day, and come and pass it with me!"

"Well, my dear, I'll cut back and ask for leave."

"But before you cut back," said Bella, who had already taken him by the chin, pulled his hat off, and begun to stick up his hair in her old way, "do say that you are sure I am giddy and inconsiderate, but have never really slighted you, pa."

"My dear, I say it with all my heart. And might I likewise observe," her father delicately hinted, with a glance out at window, "that perhaps it might be calculated to attract attention, having one's hair publicly done by a lovely woman in an elegant turn-out in Fenchurch Street?"

Bella laughed and put on his hat again. But when his boyish figure bobbed away, its shabbiness and cheerful patience smote the tears out of her eyes. "I hate that Secretary for thinking it of me," she said to herself, "and yet it seems half true!"

Back came her father, more like a boy than ever, in his release from school. "All right, my dear. Leave given at once. Really very handsomely done!"

"Now where can we find some quiet place, pa, in which I can wait for you while you go on an errand for me, if I send the carriage away?"

It demanded cogitation. "You see, my dear," he explained, "you really have become such a very lovely woman, that it ought to be a very quiet place." At length he suggested, "Near the garden up by the Trinity House on Tower Hill." So, they were driven there, and Bella dismissed the chariot; sending a pencilled note by it to Mrs. Boffin, that she was with her father.

"Now, pa, attend to what I am going to say, and promise and vow to be obedient."

"I promise and vow, my dear."

"You ask no questions. You take this purse; you go to the nearest place where they keep everything of the very, very best, ready made; you buy and put on, the most beautiful suit of clothes, the most beautiful hat, and the most beautiful pair

of bright boots (patent leather, pa, mind!) that are to be got for money; and you come back to me."

"But, my dear Bella —"

"Take care, pa!" pointing her forefinger at him merrily. "You have promised and vowed. It's perjury, you know."

There was water in the foolish little fellow's eyes, but she kissed them dry (though her own were wet), and he bobbed away again. After half an hour, he came back, so brilliantly transformed, that Bella was obliged to walk round him in ecstatic admiration twenty times, before she could draw her arm through his, and delightedly squeeze it.

"Now, pa," said Bella, hugging him close, "take this lovely woman out to dinner."

"Where shall we go, my dear?"

"Greenwich!" said Bella valiantly. "And be sure you treat this lovely woman with everything of the best."

While they were going along to take boat, "Don't you wish, my dear," said R. W. timidly, "that your mother was here?"

"No, I don't, pa, for I like to have you all to myself to-day. I was always your little favourite at home, and you were always mine. We have run away together often, before now; have n't we, pa?"

"Ah, to be sure we have! Many a Sunday when your mother was — was a little liable to it," repeating his former delicate expression after pausing to cough.

"Yes, and I am afraid I was seldom or never as good as I ought to have been, pa. I made you carry me, over and over again, when you should have made me walk; and I often drove you in harness, when you would much rather have sat down and read your newspaper; did n't I?"

"Sometimes, sometimes. But Lor', what a child you were! What a companion you were!"

"Companion? That 's just what I want to be to-day, pa."

"You are safe to succeed, my love. Your brothers and sisters have all in their turns been companions to me, to a certain extent, but only to a certain extent. Your mother has, throughout life, been a companion that any man might — might look up to — and — and commit the sayings of, to memory — and — form himself upon — if he —"

"If he liked the model?" suggested Bella.

"We-ell, ye-es," he returned, thinking about it, not quite

satisfied with the phrase; "or perhaps I might say, if it was in him. Supposing, for instance, that a man wanted to be always marching, he would find your mother an inestimable companion. But if he had any taste for walking, or should wish at any time to break into a trot, he might sometimes find it a little difficult to keep step with your mother. Or take it this way, Bella," he added, after a moment's reflection: "Supposing that a man had to go through life, we won't say with a companion, but we 'll say to a tune. Very good. Supposing that the tune allotted to him was the Dead March in Saul. Well. It would be a very suitable tune for particular occasions — none better — but it would be difficult to keep time within the ordinary run of domestic transactions. For instance, if he took his supper after a hard day, to the Dead March in Saul, his food might be likely to sit heavy on him. Or, if he was at any time inclined to relieve his mind by singing a comic song or dancing a hornpipe, and was obliged to do it to the Dead March in Saul, he might find himself put out in the execution of his lively intentions."

"Poor pa!" thought Bella, as she hung upon his arm.

"Now, what I will say for you, my dear," the cherub pursued mildly, and without a notion of complaining, "is, that you are so adaptable. So adaptable."

"Indeed, I am afraid I have shown a wretched temper, pa. I am afraid I have been very complaining, and very capricious. I seldom or never thought of it before. But when I sat in the carriage just now and saw you coming along the pavement, I reproached myself."

"Not at all, my dear. Don't speak of such a thing."

A happy and a chatty man was pa in his new clothes that day. Take it for all in all, it was perhaps the happiest day he had ever known in his life; not even excepting that on which his heroic partner had approached the nuptial altar to the tune of the Dead March in Saul.

The little expedition down the river was delightful, and the little room overlooking the river into which they were shown for dinner was delightful. Everything was delightful. The park was delightful, the punch was delightful, the dishes of fish were delightful, the wine was delightful. Bella was more delightful than any other item in the festival; drawing pa out in the gayest manner; making a point of always mentioning

herself as the lovely woman; stimulating pa to order things, by declaring that the lovely woman insisted on being treated with them; and, in short, causing pa to be quite enraptured with the consideration that he *was* the pa of such a charming daughter.

And then, as they sat looking at the ships and steamboats making their way to the sea with the tide that was running down, the lovely woman imagined all sorts of voyages for herself and pa. Now, pa, in the character of owner of a lumbering square-sailed collier, was tacking away to Newcastle, to fetch black diamonds to make his fortune with; now, pa was going to China in that handsome three-masted ship, to bring home opium, with which he would for ever cut out Chicksey, Veneering and Stobbles, and to bring home silks and shawls without end for the decoration of his charming daughter. Now, John Harmon's disastrous fate was all a dream, and he had come home and found the lovely woman just the article for him, and the lovely woman had found him just the article for her, and they were going away on a trip, in their gallant bark, to look after their vines, with streamers flying at all points, a band playing on deck, and pa established in the great cabin. Now, John Harmon was consigned to his grave again, and a merchant of immense wealth (name unknown) had courted and married the lovely woman, and he was so enormously rich that everything you saw upon the river sailing or steaming belonged to him, and he kept a perfect fleet of yachts for pleasure, and that little impudent yacht which you saw over there, with the great white sail, was called The Bella, in honour of his wife, and she held her state aboard when it pleased her, like a modern Cleopatra. Anon, there would embark in that troop-ship when she got to Gravesend a mighty general, of large property (name also unknown), who would n't hear of going to victory without his wife, and whose wife was the lovely woman, and she was destined to become the idol of all the red coats and blue jackets alow and aloft. And then again: you saw that ship being towed out by a steam-tug? Well! where did you suppose she was going to? She was going among the coral reefs and cocoanuts and all that sort of thing, and she was chartered for a fortunate individual of the name of pa (himself on board, and much respected by all hands), and she was going, for his sole profit and advantage, to fetch a cargo of sweet-smelling woods, the most beautiful that ever was seen, and the most profitable that never

were heard of, and her cargo would be a great fortune, as indeed it ought to be: the lovely woman who had purchased her and fitted her expressly for this voyage being married to an Indian Prince, who was a Something-or-Other, and who wore Cashmere shawls all over himself, and diamonds and emeralds blazing in his turban, and was beautifully coffee-coloured and excessively devoted, though a little too jealous. Thus Bella ran on merrily, in a manner perfectly enchanting to pa, who was as willing to put his head into the Sultan's tub of water as the beggar-boys below the window were to put *their* heads in the mud.

"I suppose, my dear," said pa, after dinner, "we may come to the conclusion at home, that we have lost you for good?"

Bella shook her head. Did n't know. Could n't say. All she was able to report was, that she was most handsomely supplied with everything she could possibly want, and that whenever she hinted at leaving Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, they would n't hear of it.

"And now, pa," pursued Bella, "I 'll make a confession to you. I am the most mercenary little wretch that ever lived in the world."

"I should hardly have thought it of you, my dear," returned her father, first glancing at himself, and then at the dessert.

"I understand what you mean, pa, but it 's not that. It 's not that I care for money to keep as money, but I do care so much for what it will buy!"

"Really I think most of us do," returned R. W.

"But not to the dreadful extent that I do, pa. O-o!" cried Bella, screwing the exclamation out of herself with a twist of her dimpled chin. "I AM so mercenary!"

With a wistful glance R. W. said, in default of having anything better to say: "About when did you begin to feel it coming on, my dear?"

"That 's it, pa. That 's the terrible part of it. When I was at home, and only knew what it was to be poor, I grumbled, but did n't so much mind. When I was at home expecting to be rich, I thought vaguely of all the great things I would do. But when I had been disappointed of my splendid fortune, and came to see it from day to day in other hands, and to have before my eyes what it could really do, then I became the mercenary little wretch I am."

"It's your fancy, my dear."

"I can assure you it 's nothing of the sort, pa!" said Bella, nodding at him, with her very pretty eyebrows raised as high as they would go, and looking comically frightened. "It's a fact. I am always avariciously scheming."

"Lor'! But how?"

"I'll tell you, pa. I don't mind telling *you*, because we have always been favourites of each other's, and because you are not like a pa, but more like a sort of a younger brother with a dear venerable chubbiness on him. And besides," added Bella, laughing, as she pointed a rallying finger at his face, "because I have got you in my power. This is a secret expedition. If ever you tell of me, I'll tell of you. I'll tell ma that you dined at Greenwich."

"Well; seriously, my dear," observed R. W., with some trepidation of manner, "it might be as well not to mention it."

"Aha!" laughed Bella. "I knew you would n't like it, sir! So you keep my confidence, and I'll keep yours. But betray the lovely woman and you shall find her a serpent. Now, you may give me a kiss, pa, and I should like to give your hair a turn, because it has been dreadfully neglected in my absence."

R. W. submitted his head to the operator, and the operator went on talking; at the same time putting separate locks of his hair through a curious process of being smartly rolled over her two revolving forefingers, which were then suddenly pulled out of it in opposite lateral directions. On each of these occasions the patient winced and winked.

"I have made up my mind that I must have money, pa. I feel that I can't beg it, borrow it, or steal it; and so I have resolved that I must marry it."

R. W. cast up his eyes towards her, as well as he could under the operating circumstances, and said in a tone of remonstrance, "My de-a-r Bella!"

"Have resolved, I say, pa, that to get money I must marry money. In consequence of which, I am always looking out for money to captivate."

"My de-a-r Bella!"

"Yes, pa, that is the state of the case. If ever there was a mercenary plotter whose thoughts and designs were always in her mean occupation, I am the amiable creature. But I don't care. I hate and detest being poor, and I won't be poor if I

can marry money. Now you are deliciously fluffy, pa, and in a state to astonish the waiter and pay the bill."

"But, my dear Bella, this is quite alarming at your age."

"I told you so, pa, but you would n't believe it," returned Bella, with a pleasant childish gravity. "Is n't it shocking?"

"It would be quite so, if you fully knew what you said, my dear, or meant it."

"Well, pa, I can only tell you that I mean nothing else. Talk to me of love!" said Bella contemptuously, though her face and figure certainly rendered the subject no incongruous one. "Talk to me of fiery dragons! But talk to me of poverty and wealth, and there, indeed, we touch upon realities."

"My de-ar, this is becoming Awful —" her father was emphatically beginning, when she stopped him.

"Pa, tell me. Did *you* marry money?"

"You know I did n't, my dear."

Bella hummed the Dead March in Saul, and said, after all, it signified very little! But seeing him look grave and downcast, she took him round the neck and kissed him back to cheerfulness again.

"I did n't mean that last touch, pa; it was only said in joke. Now, mind! You are not to tell of me, and I 'll not tell of you. And more than that; I promise to have no secrets from you, pa, and you may make certain that whatever mercenary things go on I shall always tell you all about them in strict confidence."

Fain to be satisfied with this concession from the lovely woman, R. W. rang the bell and paid the bill. "Now, all the rest of this, pa," said Bella, rolling up the purse when they were alone again, hammering it small with her little fist on the table, and cramming it into one of the pockets of his new waistcoat, "is for you, to buy presents with for them at home, and to pay bills with, and to divide as you like, and spend exactly as you think proper. Last of all, take notice, pa, that it 's not the fruit of any avaricious scheme. Perhaps if it was, your little mercenary wretch of a daughter would n't make so free with it!"

After which she tugged at his coat with both hands, and pulled him all askew in buttoning that garment over the precious waistcoat pocket, and then tied her dimples into her bonnet-strings in a very knowing way, and took him back to

London. Arrived at Mr. Boffin's door, she set him with his back against it, tenderly took him by the ears as convenient handles for her purpose, and kissed him until he knocked muffled double-knocks at the door with the back of his head. That done, she once more reminded him of their compact and gaily parted from him.

Not so gaily, however, but that tears filled her eyes as he went away down the dark street. Not so gaily but that she several times said, "Ah, poor little pa! Ah, poor dear struggling shabby little pa!" before she took heart to knock at the door. Not so gaily but that the brilliant furniture seemed to stare her out of countenance as if it insisted on being compared with the dingy furniture at home. Not so gaily but that she fell into very low spirits sitting late in her own room, and very heartily wept, as she wished, now that the deceased old John Harmon had never made a will about her, now that the deceased young John Harmon had lived to marry her. "Contradictory things to wish," said Bella, "but my life and fortunes are so contradictory altogether that what can I expect myself to be!"

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH THE ORPHAN MAKES HIS WILL

THE Secretary, working in the Dismal Swamp betimes next morning, was informed that a youth waited in the hall who gave the name of Sloppy. The footman who communicated this intelligence made a decent pause before uttering the name, to express that it was forced on his reluctance by the youth in question, and that if the youth had had the good sense and good taste to inherit some other name it would have spared the feelings of him the bearer.

"Mrs. Boffin will be very well pleased," said the Secretary, in a perfectly composed way. "Show him in."

Mr. Sloppy, being introduced, remained close to the door, revealing in various parts of his form many surprising, confounding, and incomprehensible buttons.

"I am glad to see you," said John Rokesmith, in a cheerful tone of welcome. "I have been expecting you."

Sloppy explained that he had meant to come before, but that the Orphan (of whom he made mention as Our Johnny) had been ailing, and he had waited to report him well.

"Then he is well now?" said the Secretary.

"No, he ain't," said Sloppy.

Mr. Sloppy having shaken his head to a considerable extent proceeded to remark that he thought Johnny "must have took 'em from the Minders." Being asked what he meant, he answered, them that come out upon him and partickler his chest. Being requested to explain himself, he stated that there was some of 'em wot you could n't kiver with a sixpence. Pressed to fall back upon a nominative case, he opined that they wos about as red as ever red could be. "But as long as they strikes out'ards, sir," continued Sloppy, "they ain't so much. It 's their striking in'ards that 's to be kep' off."

John Rokesmith hoped the child had had medical attendance? Oh, yes, said Sloppy, he had been took to the doctor's

shop once. And what did the doctor call it, Rokesmith asked him. After some perplexed reflection, Sloppy answered, brightening, "He called it something as wos wery long for spots." Rokesmith suggested measles. "No," said Sloppy, with confidence, "ever so much longer than *them*, sir!" (Mr. Sloppy was elevated by this fact, and seemed to consider that it reflected credit on the poor little patient.)

"Mrs. Boffin will be sorry to hear this," said Rokesmith.

"Mrs. Higden said so, sir, when she kep' it from her, hoping as Our Johnny would work round."

"But I hope he will?" said Rokesmith, with a quick turn upon the messenger.

"I hope so," answered Sloppy. "It depends on their striking in'ards." He then went on to say that whether Johnny had "took 'em" from the Minders, or whether the Minders had "took 'em" from Johnny, the Minders had been sent home and had "got 'em." Furthermore, that Mrs. Higden's days and nights being devoted to Our Johnny, who was never out of her lap, the whole of the mangling arrangements had devolved upon himself, and he had had "raythera tight time." The ungainly piece of honesty beamed and blushed as he said it, quite enraptured with the remembrance of having been serviceable.

"Last night," said Sloppy, "when I was a turning at the wheel pretty late, the mangle seemed to go like Our Johnny's breathing. It begun beautiful, then as it went out it shook a little and got unsteady, then as it took the turn to come home it had a rattle-like and lumbered a bit, then it come smooth, and so it went on till I scarce knowed which was mangle and which was Our Johnny. Nor Our Johnny, he scarce knowed either, for sometimes when the mangle lumbers he says, 'Me choking, Granny!' and Mrs. Higden holds him up in her lap and says to me, 'Bide a bit, Sloppy,' and we all stops together. And when Our Johnny gets his breathing again, I turns again, and we all goes on together."

Sloppy had gradually expanded with his description into a stare and a vacant grin. He now contracted, being silent, into a half-repressed gush of tears, and, under pretence of being heated, drew the under part of his sleeve across his eyes with a singularly awkward, laborious, and roundabout smear.

"This is unfortunate," said Rokesmith. "I must go and break it to Mrs. Boffin. Stay you here, Sloppy."

Sloppy stayed there, staring at the pattern of the paper on the wall, until the Secretary and Mrs. Boffin came back together. And with Mrs. Boffin was a young lady (Miss Bella Wilfer by name) who was better worth staring at, it occurred to Sloppy, than the best of wall-papering.

"Ah, my poor dear pretty little John Harmon!" exclaimed Mrs. Boffin.

"Yes, mum," said the sympathetic Sloppy.

"You don't think he is in a very, very bad way, do you?" asked the pleasant creature with a wholesome cordiality.

Put upon his good faith, and finding it in collision with his inclinations, Sloppy threw back his head and uttered a mellifluous howl, rounded off with a sniff.

"So bad as that!" cried Mrs. Boffin. "And Betty Higden not to tell me of it sooner!"

"I think she might have been mistrustful, mum," answered Sloppy, hesitating.

"Of what, for Heaven's sake?"

"I think she might have been mistrustful, mum," returned Sloppy with submission, "of standing in our Johnny's light. There 's so much trouble in illness, and so much expense, and she 's seen such a lot of its being objected to."

"But she never can have thought," said Mrs. Boffin, "that I would grudge the dear child anything?"

"No, mum, but she might have thought (as a habit-like) of its standing in Johnny's light, and might have tried to bring him through it unbeknownst."

Sloppy knew his ground well. To conceal herself in sickness, like a lower animal — to creep out of sight and coil herself away and die — had become this woman's instinct. To catch up in her arms the sick child who was dear to her, and hide it as if it were a criminal, and keep off all ministration but such as her own ignorant tenderness and patience could supply, had become this woman's idea of maternal love, fidelity, and duty. The shameful accounts we read every week in the Christian year, my lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, the infamous records of small official inhumanity, do not pass by the people as they pass by us. And hence these irrational, blind, and obstinate prejudices, so astonishing to our magnificence, and having no more reason in them — God save the Queen and Confound their politics — no, than smoke has in coming from fire!

"It's not a right place for the poor child to stay in," said Mrs. Boffin. "Tell us, dear Mr. Rokesmith, what to do for the best."

He had already thought what to do, and the consultation was very short. He could pave the way, he said, in half an hour, and then they would go down to Brentford. "Pray take me," said Bella. Therefore a carriage was ordered, of capacity to take them all, and in the mean time Sloppy was regaled, feasting alone in the Secretary's room, with a complete realisation of that fairy vision — meat, beer, vegetables, and pudding. In consequence of which his buttons became more importunate of public notice than before, with the exception of two or three about the region of the waistband, which modestly withdrew into a creasy retirement.

Punctual to the time appeared the carriage and the Secretary. He sat on the box and Mr. Sloppy graced the rumble. So to the Three Magpies as before, where Mrs. Boffin and Miss Bella were handed out, and whence they all went on foot to Mrs. Betty Higden's.

But on the way down, they had stopped at a toy-shop, and had bought that noble charger, a description of whose points and trappings had on the last occasion conciliated the then worldly minded orphan, and also a Noah's ark, and also a yellow bird with an artificial voice in him, and also a military doll so well dressed that if he had only been of life-size his brother officers in the Guards might never have found him out. Bearing these gifts, they raised the latch of Betty Higden's door, and saw her sitting in the dimmest and farthest corner with poor Johnny in her lap.

"And how's my boy, Betty?" asked Mrs. Boffin, sitting down beside her.

"He's bad! he's bad!" said Betty. "I begin to be afeerd he'll not be yours any more than mine. All others belonging to him have gone to the Power and the Glory, and I have a mind that they're drawing him to them — leading him away."

"No, no, no," said Mrs. Boffin.

"I don't know why else he clenches his little hand as if it had hold of a finger that I can't see. Look at it," said Betty, opening the wrappers in which the flushed child lay, and showing his small right hand lying closed upon his breast. "It's always so. It don't mind me."

"Is he asleep?"

"No, I think not. You're not asleep, my Johnny?"

"No," said Johnny, with a quiet air of pity for himself, and without opening his eyes.

"Here's the lady, Johnny. And the horse."

Johnny could bear the lady, with complete indifference, but not the horse. Opening his heavy eyes, he slowly broke into a smile on beholding that splendid phenomenon, and wanted to take it in his arms. As it was much too big, it was put upon a chair where he could hold it by the mane and contemplate it. Which he soon forgot to do.

But Johnny murmuring something with his eyes closed, and Mrs. Boffin not knowing what, old Betty bent her ear to listen and took pains to understand. Being asked by her to repeat what he had said, he did so two or three times, and then it came out that he must have seen more than they supposed when he looked up to see the horse, for the murmur was, "Who is the boofer lady?" Now, the boofer, or beautiful, lady was Bella; and whereas this notice from the poor baby would have touched her of itself, it was rendered more pathetic by the late melting of her heart to her poor little father, and their joke about the lovely woman. So Bella's behaviour was very tender and very natural when she kneeled on the brick floor to clasp the child, and when the child, with a child's admiration of what is young and pretty, fondled the boofer lady.

"Now, my good dear Betty," said Mrs. Boffin, hoping that she saw her opportunity, and laying her hand persuasively on her arm; "we have come to remove Johnny from this cottage to where he can be taken better care of."

Instantly, and before another word could be spoken, the old woman started up with blazing eyes, and rushed at the door with the sick child.

"Stand away from me every one of ye!" she cried out wildly. "I see what ye mean, now. Let me go my way, all of ye. I'd sooner kill the Pretty, and kill myself!"

"Stay, stay!" said Rokesmith, soothing her. "You don't understand."

"I understand too well. I know too much about it, sir. I've run from it too many a year. No! Never for me, nor for the child, while there's water enough in England to cover us!"

The terror, the shame, the passion of horror and repugnance, firing the worn face and perfectly maddening it, would have been a quite terrible sight, if embodied in one old fellow-creature alone. Yet it "crops up" — as our slang goes — my lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, in other fellow-creatures, rather frequently!

"It's been chasing me all my life, but it shall never take me nor mine alive!" cried old Betty. "I've done with ye. I'd have fastened door and window and starved out, afore I'd ever have let ye in, if I had known what ye came for!"

But catching sight of Mrs. Boffin's wholesome face, she relented, and crouching down by the door and bending over her burden to hush it, said humbly: "Maybe my fears has put me wrong. If they have so, tell me, and the good Lord forgive me! I'm quick to take this fright, I know, and my head is summ'at light with wearying and watching."

"There, there, there!" returned Mrs. Boffin. "Come, come! Say no more of it, Betty. It was a mistake, a mistake. Any one of us might have made it in your place, and felt just as you do."

"The Lord bless ye!" said the old woman, stretching out her hand.

"Now, see, Betty," pursued the sweet compassionate soul, holding the hand kindly, "what I really did mean, and what I should have begun by saying out, if I had only been a little wiser and handier. We want to move Johnny to a place where there are none but children; a place set up on purpose for sick children; where the good doctors and nurses pass their lives with children, talk to none but children, touch none but children, comfort and cure none but children."

"Is there really such a place?" asked the old woman, with a gaze of wonder.

"Yes, Betty, on my word, and you shall see it. If my home was a better place for the dear boy, I'd take him to it; but indeed, indeed, it's not."

"You shall take him," returned Betty, fervently kissing the comforting hand, "where you will, my deary. I am not so hard but that I believe your face and voice, and I will, as long as I can see and hear."

This victory gained, Rokesmith made haste to profit by it, for he saw how wofully time had been lost. He despatched

Sloppy to bring the carriage to the door; caused the child to be carefully wrapped up; bade old Betty get her bonnet on; collected the toys, enabling the little fellow to comprehend that his treasures were to be transported with him; and had all things prepared so easily that they were ready for the carriage as soon as it appeared, and in a minute afterwards were on their way. Sloppy they left behind, relieving his overcharged breast with a paroxysm of mangling.

At the Children's Hospital, the gallant steed, the Noah's ark, the yellow bird, and the officer in the Guards, were made as welcome as their child-owner. But the doctor said aside to Rokesmith, "This should have been days ago. Too late!"

However, they were all carried up into a fresh, airy room, and there Johnny came to himself, out of a sleep or a swoon or whatever it was, to find himself lying in a little quiet bed, with a little platform over his breast, on which were already arranged, to give him heart and urge him to cheer up, the Noah's ark, the noble steed, and the yellow bird, with the officer in the Guards doing duty over the whole, quite as much to the satisfaction of his country as if he had been upon parade. And at the bed's head was a coloured picture beautiful to see, representing as it were another Johnny seated on the knee of some Angel surely who loved little children. And, marvellous fact, to lie and stare at: Johnny had become one of a little family, all in little quiet beds (except two playing dominoes in little arm-chairs at a little table on the hearth); and on all the little beds were little platforms whereon were to be seen dolls' houses, woolly dogs with mechanical barks in them not very dissimilar from the artificial voice pervading the bowels of the yellow bird, tin armies, Moorish tumblers, wooden tea-things, and the riches of the earth.

As Johnny murmured something in his placid admiration, the ministering women at his bed's head asked him what he said. It seemed that he wanted to know whether all these were brothers and sisters of his? So they told him yes. It seemed then that he wanted to know whether God had brought them all together there? So they told him yes again. They made out then that he wanted to know whether they would all get out of pain? So they answered yes to that question likewise, and made him understand that the reply included himself.

Johnny's powers of sustaining conversation were as yet so

very imperfectly developed, even in a state of health, that in sickness they were little more than monosyllabic. But he had to be washed and tended, and remedies were applied, and though those offices were far, far more skilfully and lightly done than ever anything had been done for him in his little life, so rough and short, they would have hurt and tired him but for an amazing circumstance which laid hold of his attention. This was no less than the appearance on his own little platform in pairs, of All Creation, on its way into his own particular ark; the elephant leading, and the fly, with a diffident sense of his size, politely bringing up the rear. A very little brother lying in the next bed with a broken leg was so enchanted by this spectacle that his delight exalted its enthralling interest; and so came rest and sleep.

"I see you are not afraid to leave the dear child here, Betty," whispered Mrs. Boffin.

"No, ma'am. Most willingly, most thankfully, with all my heart and soul."

So they kissed him, and left him there, and old Betty was to come back early in the morning, and nobody but Rokesmith knew for certain how that the doctor had said, "This should have been days ago. Too late!"

But Rokesmith knowing it, and knowing that his bearing it in mind would be acceptable thereafter to that good woman who had been the only light in the childhood of desolate John Harmon dead and gone, resolved that late at night he would go back to the bedside of John Harmon's namesake, and see how it fared with him.

The family whom God had brought together were not all asleep, but were all quiet. From bed to bed, a light womanly tread and a pleasant fresh face passed in the silence of the night. A little head would lift itself up into the softened light here and there, to be kissed as the face went by — for these little patients are very loving — and would then submit itself to be composed to rest again. The mite with the broken leg was restless, and moaned; but after a while turned his face towards Johnny's bed, to fortify himself with a view of the ark, and fell asleep. Over most of the beds, the toys were yet grouped as the children had left them when they last laid themselves down, and, in their innocent grotesqueness and incongruity, they might have stood for the children's dreams.

The doctor came in, too, to see how it fared with Johnny. And he and Rokesmith stood together, looking down with compassion on him.

"What is it, Johnny?" Rokesmith was the questioner, and put an arm round the poor baby as he made a struggle.

"Him!" said the little fellow. "Those!"

The doctor was quick to understand children, and taking the horse, the ark, the yellow bird, and the man in the Guards, from Johnny's bed, softly placed them on that of his next neighbour, the mite with the broken leg.

With a weary and yet a pleased smile, and with an action as if he stretched his little figure out to rest, the child heaved his body on the sustaining arm, and, seeking Rokesmith's face with his lips, said: —

"A kiss for the boofer lady."

Having now bequeathed all he had to dispose of, and arranged his affairs in this world, Johnny, thus speaking, left it.

CHAPTER X

A SUCCESSOR

SOME of the Reverend Frank Milvey's brethren had found themselves exceedingly uncomfortable in their minds, because they were required to bury the dead too hopefully. But the Reverend Frank, inclining to the belief that they were required to do one or two other things (say out of nine-and-thirty) calculated to trouble their consciences rather more if they would think as much about them, held his peace.

Indeed, the Reverend Frank Milvey was a forbearing man, who noticed many sad warps and blights in the vineyard wherein he worked, and did not profess that they made him savagely wise. He only learned that the more he himself knew, in his little, limited, human way, the better he could distantly imagine what Omniscience might know.

Wherefore, if the Reverend Frank had had to read the words that troubled some of his brethren, and profitably touched innumerable hearts, in a worse case than Johnny's, he would have done so out of the pity and humility of his soul. Reading them over Johnny, he thought of his own six children, but not of his poverty, and read them with dimmed eyes. And very seriously did he and his bright little wife, who had been listening, look down into the small grave and walk home arm in arm.

There was grief in the aristocratic house, and there was joy in the Bower. Mr. Wegg argued, if an orphan were wanted, was he not an orphan himself, and could a better be desired? And why go beating about Brentford bushes, seeking orphans forsooth who had established no claims upon you and made no sacrifices for you, when here was an orphan ready to your hand who had given up in your cause, Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker?

Mr. Wegg chuckled, consequently, when he heard the tidings. Nay, it was afterwards affirmed by a witness who

shall at present be nameless, that in the seclusion of the Bower he poked out his wooden leg, in the stage-ballet manner, and executed a taunting or triumphant pirouette on the genuine leg remaining to him.

John Rokesmith's manner towards Mrs. Boffin at this time was more the manner of a young man towards a mother than that of a Secretary towards his employer's wife. It had always been marked by a subdued, affectionate deference that seemed to have sprung up on the very day of his engagement; whatever was odd in her dress or her ways had seemed to have no oddity for him; he had sometimes borne a quietly amused face in her company, but still it had seemed as if the pleasure her genial temper and radiant nature yielded him could have been quite as naturally expressed in a tear as in a smile. The completeness of his sympathy with her fancy for having a little John Harmon to protect and rear, he had shown in every act and word, and now that the kind fancy was disappointed, he treated it with a manly tenderness and respect for which she could hardly thank him enough.

"But I do thank you, Mr. Rokesmith," said Mrs. Boffin, "and I thank you most kindly. You love children."

"I hope everybody does."

"They ought," said Mrs. Boffin; "but we don't all of us do what we ought; do us?"

John Rokesmith replied, "Some among us supply the shortcomings of the rest. You have loved children well, Mr. Boffin has told me."

"Not a bit better than he has, but that's his way; he puts all the good upon me. You speak rather sadly, Mr. Rokesmith."

"Do I?"

"It sounds to me so. Were you one of many children?"

He shook his head.

"An only child?"

"No, there was another. Dead long ago."

"Father or mother alive?"

"Dead."

"And the rest of your relations?"

"Dead — if I ever had any living. I never heard of any."

At this point of the dialogue Bella came in with a light step. She paused at the door a moment, hesitating whether to remain or retire; perplexed by finding that she was not observed.

"Now, don't mind an old lady's talk," said Mrs. Boffin, "but tell me. Are you quite sure, Mr. Rokesmith, that you have never had a disappointment in love?"

"Quite sure. Why do you ask me?"

"Why, for this reason. Sometimes you have a kind of kept-down manner with you, which is not like your age. You can't be thirty?"

"I am not yet thirty."

Deeming it high time to make her presence known, Bella coughed here to attract attention, begged pardon, and said she would go, fearing that she interrupted some matter of business.

"No, don't go," rejoined Mrs. Boffin, "because we are coming to business, instead of having begun it, and you belong to it as much now, my dear Bella, as I do. But I want my Noddy to consult with us. Would somebody be so good as find my Noddy for me?"

Rokesmith departed on that errand, and presently returned accompanied by Mr. Boffin at his jog-trot. Bella felt a little vague trepidation as to the subject-matter of this same consultation, until Mrs. Boffin announced it.

"Now, you come and sit by me, my dear," said that worthy soul, taking her comfortable place on a large ottoman in the centre of the room, and drawing her arm through Bella's; "and, Noddy, you sit here, and, Mr. Rokesmith, you sit there. Now, you see, what I want to talk about is this. Mr. and Mrs. Milvey have sent me the kindest note possible (which Mr. Rokesmith just now read to me out loud, for I ain't good at handwritings), offering to find me another little child to name and educate and bring up. Well. This has set me thinking."

("And she is a steam-ingein at it," murmured Mr. Boffin, in an admiring parenthesis, "when she once begins. It may n't be so easy to start her; but once started she 's a ingein.")

"— This has set me thinking, I say," repeated Mrs. Boffin, cordially beaming under the influence of her husband's compliment, "and I have thought two things. First of all, that I have grown timid of reviving John Harmon's name. It 's an unfortunate name, and I fancy I should reproach myself if I gave it to another dear child, and it proved again unlucky."

"Now, whether," said Mr. Boffin, gravely propounding a case for his Secretary's opinion — "whether one might call that a superstition?"

"It is a matter of feeling with Mrs. Boffin," said Rokesmith gently. "The name has always been unfortunate. It has now this new unfortunate association connected with it. The name has died out. Why revive it? Might I ask Miss Wilfer what she thinks?"

"It has not been a fortunate name for me," said Bella, colouring, — "or at least it was not, until it led to my being here — but that is not the point in my thoughts. As we had given the name to the poor child, and as the poor child took so lovingly to me, I think I should feel jealous of calling another child by it. I think I should feel as if the name had become endeared to me, and I had no right to use it so."

"And that 's your opinion?" remarked Mr. Boffin, observant of the Secretary's face and again addressing him.

"I say again, it is a matter of feeling," returned the Secretary. "I think Miss Wilfer's feeling very womanly and pretty."

"Now, give us your opinion, Noddy," said Mrs. Boffin.

"My opinion, old lady," returned the Golden Dustman, "is your opinion."

"Then," said Mrs. Boffin, "we agree not to revive John Harmon's name, but to let it rest in the grave. It is, as Mr. Rokesmith says, a matter of feeling, but, Lor'! how many matters *are* matters of feeling! Well; and so I come to the second thing I have thought of. You must know, Bella, my dear, and Mr. Rokesmith, that when I first named to my husband my thoughts of adopting a little orphan boy in remembrance of John Harmon, I further named to my husband that it was comforting to think that how the poor boy would be benefited by John's own money, and protected from John's own forlornness."

"Hear, hear!" cried Mr. Boffin. "So she did. Ancoar!"

"No, not Ancoar, Noddy, my dear," returned Mrs. Boffin, "because I am going to say something else. I meant that, I am sure, as much as I still mean it. But this little death has made me ask myself the question, seriously, whether I was n't too bent upon pleasing myself. Else why did I seek out so much for a pretty child, and a child quite to my own liking? Wanting to do good, why not do it for its own sake, and put my tastes and likings by?"

"Perhaps," said Bella; and perhaps she said it with some

little sensitiveness arising out of those old curious relations of hers towards the murdered man — "perhaps, in reviving the name, you would not have liked to give it to a less interesting child than the original. He interested you very much."

"Well, my dear," returned Mrs. Boffin, giving her a squeeze, "it's kind of you to find that reason out, and I hope it may have been so, and, indeed, to a certain extent I believe it was so, but I am afraid not to the whole extent. However, that don't come in question now, because we have done with the name."

"Laid it up as a remembrance," suggested Bella musingly.

"Much better said, my dear; laid it up as a remembrance. Well, then; I have been thinking if I take any orphan to provide for, let it not be a pet and a plaything for me, but a creature to be helped for its own sake."

"Not pretty, then?" said Bella.

"No," returned Mrs. Boffin stoutly.

"Nor prepossessing, then?" said Bella.

"No," returned Mrs. Boffin. "Not necessarily so. That's as it may happen. A well-disposed boy comes in my way who may be even a little wanting in such advantages for getting on in life, but is honest and industrious and requires a helping hand and deserves it. If I am very much in earnest and quite determined to be unselfish, let me take care of *him*."

Here the footman whose feelings had been hurt on the former occasion appeared, and, crossing to Rokesmith, apologetically announced the objectionable Sloppy.

The four members of Council looked at one another, and paused. "Shall he be brought here, ma'am?" asked Rokesmith.

"Yes," said Mrs. Boffin. Whereupon the footman disappeared, reappeared presenting Sloppy, and retired much disgusted.

The consideration of Mrs. Boffin had clothed Mr. Sloppy in a suit of black, on which the tailor had received personal directions from Rokesmith to expend the utmost cunning of his art, with a view to the concealment of the cohering and sustaining buttons. But so much more powerful were the frailties of Sloppy's form than the strongest resources of tailoring science that he now stood before the Council, a perfect Argus in the way of buttons; shining and winking and gleaming and twink-

ling out of a hundred of those eyes of bright metal, at the dazzled spectators. The artistic taste of some unknown hatter had furnished him with a hatband of wholesale capacity which was fluted behind, from the crown of his hat to the brim, and terminated in a black bunch, from which the imagination shrunk discomfited and the reason revolted. Some special powers with which his legs were endowed had already hitched up his glossy trousers at the ankles, and bagged at the knees; while similar gifts in his arms had raised his coat-sleeves from his wrists and accumulated them at his elbows. Thus set forth, with the additional embellishments of a very little tail to his coat, and a yawning gulf at his waistband, Sloppy stood confessed.

"And how is Betty, my good fellow?" Mrs. Boffin asked him.

"Thankee, mum," said Sloppy, "she do pretty nicely, and sending her dooty and many thanks for the tea and all faviours and wishing to know the family's healths."

"Have you just come, Sloppy?"

"Yes, mum."

"Then you have not had your dinner yet?"

"No, mum. But I mean to it. For I ain't forgotten your handsome orders that I was never to go away without having had a good 'un off of meat and beer and pudding — no, there was four of 'em, for I reckoned 'em up when I had 'em; meat one, beer two, vegetables three, and which was four? — Why pudding, *he* was four!" Here Sloppy threw his head back, opened his mouth wide, and laughed rapturously.

"How are the two poor little Minders?" asked Mrs. Boffin.

"Striking right out, mum, and coming round beautiful."

Mrs. Boffin looked on the other three members of Council, and then said, beckoning with her finger: —

"Sloppy."

"Yes, mum."

"Come forward, Sloppy. Should you like to dine here every day?"

"Off of all four on 'em, mum? Oh, mum!" Sloppy's feelings obliged him to squeeze his hat, and contract one leg at the knee.

"Yes. And should you like to be always taken care of here, if you were industrious and deserving?"

"Oh, mum! — But there's Mrs. Higden," said Sloppy,

checking himself in his raptures, drawing back, and shaking his head with very serious meaning. "There's Mrs. Higden. Mrs. Higden goes before all. None can ever be better friends to me than Mrs. Higden's been. And she must be turned for, must Mrs. Higden. Where would Mrs. Higden be if she warn't turned for!" At the mere thought of Mrs. Higden in this inconceivable affliction, Mr. Sloppy's countenance became pale, and manifested the most distressful emotions.

"You are as right as right can be, Sloppy," said Mrs. Boffin, "and far be it from me to tell you otherwise. It shall be seen to. If Betty Higden can be turned for all the same, you shall come here and be taken care of for life, and be made able to keep her in other ways than the turning."

"Even as to that, mum," answered the ecstatic Sloppy, "the turning might be done in the night, don't you see? I could be here in the day, and turn in the night. I don't want no sleep, *I* don't. Or even if I any ways should want a wink or two," added Sloppy, after a moment's apologetic reflection, "I could take 'em turning. I've took 'em turning many a time, and enjoyed 'em wonderful!"

On the grateful impulse of the moment, Mr. Sloppy kissed Mrs. Boffin's hand, and then, detaching himself from that good creature that he might have room enough for his feelings, threw back his head, opened his mouth wide, and uttered a dismal howl. It was creditable to his tenderness of heart, but suggested that he might on occasion give some offence to the neighbours; the rather, as the footman looked in, and begged pardon, finding he was not wanted, but excused himself, on the ground "that he thought it was Cats."

CHAPTER XI

SOME AFFAIRS OF THE HEART

LITTLE Miss Peecher, from her little official dwelling-house, with its little windows like the eyes in needles, and its little doors like the covers of school-books, was very observant indeed of the object of her quiet affections. Love, though said to be afflicted with blindness, is a vigilant watchman, and Miss Peecher kept him on double duty over Mr. Bradley Headstone. It was not that she was naturally given to playing the spy — it was not that she was at all secret, plotting, or mean — it was simply that she loved the irresponsive Bradley with all the primitive and homely stock of love that had never been examined or certificated out of her. If her faithful slate had had the latent qualities of sympathetic paper, and its pencil those of invisible ink, many a little treatise calculated to astonish the pupils would have come bursting through the dry sums in school-time under the warming influence of Miss Peecher's bosom. For oftentimes when school was not, and her calm leisure and calm little house were her own, Miss Peecher would commit to the confidential slate an imaginary description of how, upon a balmy evening at dusk, two figures might liave been observed in the market-garden ground round the corner, of whom one, being a manly form, bent over the other, being a womanly form of short stature and some compactness, and breathed in a low voice the words, "Emma Peecher, wilt thou be my own?" after which the womanly form's head reposed upon the manly form's shoulder, and the nightingales tuned up. Though all unseen, and unsuspected by the pupils, Bradley Headstone even pervaded the school exercises. Was Geography in question? He would come triumphantly flying out of Vesuvius and Ætna ahead of the lava, and would boil unharmed in the hot springs of Iceland, and would float majestically down the Ganges and the Nile. Did History chronicle a king of men? Behold him in pepper-and-salt pantaloons, with his

watch-guard round his neck. Were copies to be written? In capital B's and H's most of the girls under Miss Peecher's tuition were half a year ahead of every other letter in the alphabet. And Mental Arithmetic, administered by Miss Peecher, often devoted itself to providing Bradley Headstone with a wardrobe of fabulous extent; fourscore and four neckties at two and ninepence-halfpenny, two gross of silver watches at four pounds fifteen and sixpence, seventy-four black hats at eighteen shillings; and many similar superfluities.

The vigilant watchman, using his daily opportunities of turning his eyes in Bradley's direction, soon apprised Miss Peecher that Bradley was more preoccupied than had been his wont, and more given to strolling about with a downcast and reserved face, turning something difficult in his mind that was not in the scholastic syllabus. Putting this and that together — combining under the head "this" present appearances and the intimacy with Charley Hexam, and ranging under the head "that" the visit to his sister, the watchman reported to Miss Peecher his strong suspicions that the sister was at the bottom of it.

"I wonder," said Miss Peecher, as she sat making up her weekly report on a half-holiday afternoon, "what they call Hexam's sister?"

Mary Anne, at her needle-work, attendant and attentive, held her arm up.

"Well, Mary Anne?"

"She is named Lizzie, ma'am."

"She can hardly be named Lizzie, I think, Mary Anne," returned Miss Peecher, in a tunefully instructive voice. "Is Lizzie a Christian name, Mary Anne?"

Mary Anne laid down her work, rose, hooked herself behind, as being under catechisation, and replied: "No, it is a corruption, Miss Peecher."

"Who gave her that name?" Miss Peecher was going on, from the mere force of habit, when she checked herself on Mary Anne's evincing theological impatience to strike in with her godfathers and her godmothers, and said: "I mean of what name is it a corruption?"

"Elizabeth or Eliza, Miss Peecher."

"Right, Mary Anne. Whether there were any Lizzies in the early Christian Church must be considered very doubtful, very doubtful." Miss Peecher was exceedingly sage here.

"Speaking correctly, we say, then, that Hexam's sister is called Lizzie; not that she is named so. Do we not, Mary Anne?"

"We do, Miss Peecher."

"And where," pursued Miss Peecher, complacent in her little transparent fiction of conducting the examination in a semi-official manner for Mary Anne's benefit, not her own — "where does this young woman, who is called but not named Lizzie, live? Think, now, before answering."

"In Church Street, Smith Square, by Mill Bank, ma'am."

"In Church Street, Smith Square, by Mill Bank," repeated Miss Peecher, as if possessed beforehand of the book in which it was written. "Exactly so. And what occupation does this young woman pursue, Mary Anne? Take time."

"She has a place of trust at an outfitter's in the City, ma'am."

"Oh!" said Miss Peecher, pondering on it; but smoothly added, in a confirmatory tone, "At an outfitter's in the City. Ye-es?"

"And Charley —" Mary Anne was proceeding, when Miss Peecher stared.

"I mean Hexam, Miss Peecher."

"I should think you did, Mary Anne. I am glad to hear you do. And Hexam —?"

"Says," Mary Anne went on, "that he is not pleased with his sister, and that his sister won't be guided by his advice, and persists in being guided by somebody else's; and that —"

"Mr. Headstone coming across the garden!" exclaimed Miss Peecher, with a flushed glance at the looking-glass. "You have answered very well, Mary Anne. You are forming an excellent habit of arranging your thoughts clearly. That will do."

The discreet Mary Anne resumed her seat and her silence, and stitched, and stitched, and was stitching when the schoolmaster's shadow came in before him, announcing that he might be instantly expected.

"Good evening, Miss Peecher," he said, pursuing the shadow, and taking its place.

"Good evening, Mr. Headstone. Mary Anne, a chair."

"Thank you," said Bradley, seating himself in his constrained manner. "This is but a flying visit. I have looked in, on my way, to ask a kindness of you as a neighbour."

"Did you say on your way, Mr. Headstone?" asked Miss Peecher.

"On my way to — where I am going."

"Church Street, Smith Square, by Mill Bank," repeated Miss Peecher, in her own thoughts.

"Charley Hexam has gone to get a book or two he wants, and will probably be back before me. As we leave my house empty, I took the liberty of telling him I would leave the key here. Would you kindly allow me to do so?"

"Certainly, Mr. Headstone. Going for an evening walk, sir?"

"Partly for a walk, and partly for — on business."

"Business in Church Street, Smith Square, by Mill Bank," repeated Miss Peecher to herself.

"Having said which," pursued Bradley, laying his door-key on the table, "I must be already going. There is nothing I can do for you, Miss Peecher?"

"Thank you, Mr. Headstone. In which direction?"

"In the direction of Westminster."

"Mill Bank," Miss Peecher repeated in her own thoughts once again. "No, thank you, Mr. Headstone, I'll not trouble you."

"You could n't trouble me," said the schoolmaster.

"Ah!" returned Miss Peecher, though not aloud; "but you can trouble *me!*" And for all her quiet manner, and her quiet smile, she was full of trouble as he went his way.

She was right touching his destination. He held as straight a course for the house of the dolls' dressmaker as the wisdom of his ancestors, exemplified in the construction of the intervening streets, would let him, and walked with a bent head hammering at one fixed idea. It had been an immovable idea since he first set eyes upon her. It seemed to him as if all that he could suppress in himself he had suppressed, as if all that he could restrain in himself he had restrained, and the time had come — in a rush, in a moment — when the power of self-command had departed from him. Love at first sight is a trite expression quite sufficiently discussed; enough that in certain smouldering natures like this man's, that passion leaps into a blaze, and makes such head as fire does in a rage of wind, when other passions, but for its mastery, could be held in chains. As a multitude of weak, imitative natures are always lying by, ready to go mad upon the next wrong idea that may be broached — in these times, generally some form of tribute to Somebody from

something that never was done, or, if ever done, that was done by Somebody Else — so these less ordinary natures may lie by for years, ready on the touch of an instant to burst into flame.

The schoolmaster went his way, brooding and brooding, and a sense of being vanquished in a struggle might have been pieced out of his worried face. Truly, in his breast there lingered a resentful shame to find himself defeated by this passion for Charley Hexam's sister, though in the very self-same moments he was concentrating himself upon the object of bringing the passion to a successful issue.

He appeared before the dolls' dressmaker, sitting alone at her work. "Oho!" thought that sharp young personage, "it's you, is it? *I* know your tricks and your manners, my friend!"

"Hexam's sister," said Bradley Headstone, "is not come home yet?"

"You are quite a conjurer," returned Miss Wren.

"I will wait, if you please, for I want to speak to her."

"Do you?" returned Miss Wren. "Sit down. I hope it's mutual."

Bradley glanced distrustfully at the shrewd face again bending over the work, and said, trying to conquer doubt and hesitation: —

"I hope you don't imply that my visit will be unacceptable to Hexam's sister?"

"There! Don't call her that. I can't bear you to call her that," returned Miss Wren, snapping her fingers in a volley of impatient snaps, "for I don't like Hexam."

"Indeed?"

"No." Miss Wren wrinkled her nose to express dislike. "Selfish. Thinks only of himself. The way with all of you."

"The way with all of us? Then you don't like *me?*"

"So-so," replied Miss Wren, with a shrug and a laugh. "Don't know much about you."

"But I was not aware it was the way with all of us," said Bradley, returning to the accusation, a little injured. "Won't you say, some of us?"

"Meaning," returned the little creature, "every one of you, but you. Hah! Now look this lady in the face. This is Mrs. Truth. The Honourable. Full-dressed."

Bradley glanced at the doll she held up for his observation — which had been lying on its face on her bench, while with a needle and thread she fastened the dress on at the back — and looked from it to her.

"I stand the Honourable Mrs. T. on my bench in this corner against the wall, where her blue eyes can shine upon you," pursued Miss Wren, doing so, and making two little dabs at him in the air with her needle, as if she pricked him with it in his own eyes; "and I defy you to tell me, with Mrs. T. for a witness, what you have come here for."

"To see Hexam's sister."

"You don't say so!" retorted Miss Wren, hitching her chin. "But on whose account?"

"Her own."

"Oh, Mrs. T.!" exclaimed Miss Wren. "You hear him!"

"To reason with her," pursued Bradley, half humouring what was present, and half angry with what was not present; "for her own sake."

"Oh, Mrs. T.!" exclaimed the dressmaker.

"For her own sake," repeated Bradley, warming, "and for her brother's, and as a perfectly disinterested person."

"Really, Mrs. T.," remarked the dressmaker, "since it comes to this, we must positively turn you with your face to the wall." She had hardly done so, when Lizzie Hexam arrived, and showed some surprise on seeing Bradley Headstone there, and Jenny shaking her little fist at him close before her eyes, and the Honourable Mrs. T. with her face to the wall.

"Here 's a perfectly disinterested person, Lizzie dear," said the knowing Miss Wren, "come to talk with you, for your own sake and your brother's. Think of that. I am sure there ought to be no third party present at anything so very kind and so very serious; and so, if you 'll remove third party up stairs, my dear, the third party will retire."

Lizzie took the hand which the dolls' dressmaker held out to her for the purpose of being supported away, but only looked at her with an inquiring smile, and made no other movement.

"The third party hobbles awfully, you know, when she 's left to herself," said Miss Wren, "her back being so bad, and her legs so queer; so she can't retire gracefully unless you help her, Lizzie."

"She can do no better than stay where she is," returned

Lizzie, releasing the hand, and laying her own lightly on Miss Jenny's curls. And then to Bradley: "From Charley, sir?"

In an irresolute way, and stealing a clumsy look at her, Bradley rose to place a chair for her, and then returned to his own.

"Strictly speaking," said he, "I come from Charley, because I left him only a little while ago; but I am not commissioned by Charley. I come of my own spontaneous act."

With her elbows on her bench, and her chin upon her hands, Miss Jenny Wren sat looking at him with a watchful sidelong look. Lizzie, in her different way, sat looking at him too.

"The fact is," began Bradley, with a mouth so dry that he had some difficulty in articulating his words; the consciousness of which rendered his manner still more ungainly and undecided, — "the truth is, that Charley, having no secrets from me (to the best of my belief), has confided the whole of this matter to me."

He came to a stop, and Lizzie asked: "What matter, sir?"

"I thought," returned the schoolmaster, stealing another look at her, and seeming to try in vain to sustain it; for the look dropped as it lighted on her eyes, "that it might be so superfluous as to be almost impertinent to enter upon a definition of it. My allusion was to this matter of your having put aside your brother's plans for you, and given the preference to those of Mr. — I believe the name is Mr. Eugene Wrayburn."

He made this point of not being certain of the name, with another uneasy look at her, which dropped like the last.

Nothing being said on the other side, he had to begin again, and began with new embarrassment.

"Your brother's plans were communicated to me when he first had them in his thoughts. In point of fact he spoke to me about them when I was last here — when we were walking back together, and when I — when the impression was fresh upon me of having seen his sister."

There might have been no meaning in it, but the little dressmaker here removed one of her supporting hands from her chin, and musingly turned the Honourable Mrs. T. with her face to the company. That done, she fell into her former attitude.

"I approve of his idea," said Bradley, with his uneasy look wandering to the doll, and unconsciously resting there longer than it had rested on Lizzie, "both because your brother ought naturally to be the originator of any such scheme, and because I hoped to be able to promote it. I should have had inexpressible pleasure, I should have taken inexpressible interest, in promoting it. Therefore I must acknowledge that when your brother was disappointed, I too was disappointed. I wish to avoid reservation or concealment, and I fully acknowledge that."

He appeared to have encouraged himself by having got so far. At all events, he went on with much greater firmness and force of emphasis; though with a curious disposition to set his teeth, and with a curious tight-screwing movement of his right hand in the clenching palm of his left, like the action of one who was being physically hurt, and was unwilling to cry out.

"I am a man of strong feelings, and I have strongly felt this disappointment. I do strongly feel it. I don't show what I feel; some of us are obliged habitually to keep it down. To keep it down. But to return to your brother. He has taken the matter so much to heart that he has remonstrated (in my presence he remonstrated) with Mr. Eugene Wrayburn, if that be the name. He did so, quite ineffectually. As any one not blinded to the real character of Mr. — Mr. Eugene Wrayburn — would readily suppose."

He looked at Lizzie again, and held the look. And his face turned from burning red to white, and from white back to burning red, and so for the time to lasting deadly white.

"Finally, I resolved to come here alone, and appeal to you. I resolved to come here alone, and entreat you to retract the course you have chosen, and instead of confiding in a mere stranger — a person of most insolent behaviour to your brother and others — to prefer your brother and your brother's friend."

Lizzie Hexam had changed colour when those changes came over him, and her face now expressed some anger, more dislike, and even a touch of fear. But she answered him very steadily.

"I cannot doubt, Mr. Headstone, that your visit is well meant. You have been so good a friend to Charley that I have no right to doubt it. I have nothing to tell Charley, but that I accepted the help to which he so much objects before he made any plans for me; or certainly before I knew of any. It was

considerately and delicately offered, and there were reasons that had weight with me which should be as dear to Charley as to me. I have no more to say to Charley on this subject."

His lips trembled and stood apart, as he followed this repudiation of himself and limitation of her words to her brother.

"I should have told Charley, if he had come to me," she resumed, as though it were an after-thought, "that Jenny and I find our teacher very able and very patient, and that she takes great pains with us. So much so, that we have said to her we hope in a very little while to be able to go on by ourselves. Charley knows about teachers, and I should also have told him, for his satisfaction, that ours comes from an institution where teachers are regularly brought up."

"I should like to ask you," said Bradley Headstone, grinding his words slowly out, as though they came from a rusty mill, — "I should like to ask you, if I may without offence, whether you would have objected — no; rather, I should like to say, if I may without offence, that I wish I had had the opportunity of coming here with your brother and devoting my poor abilities and experience to your service."

"Thank you, Mr. Headstone."

"But I fear," he pursued, after a pause, furtively wrenching at the seat of his chair with one hand, as if he would have wrenched the chair to pieces, and gloomily observing her while her eyes were cast down, "that my humble services would not have found much favour with you?"

She made no reply, and the poor stricken wretch sat contending with himself in a heat of passion and torment. After a while he took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead and hands.

"There is only one thing more I had to say, but it is the most important. There is a reason against this matter, there is a personal relation concerned in this matter, not yet explained to you. It might — I don't say it would — it might — induce you to think differently. To proceed under the present circumstances is out of the question. Will you please come to the understanding that there shall be another interview on the subject?"

"With Charley, Mr. Headstone?"

"With — well," he answered, breaking off, "yes! Say with him too. Will you please come to the understanding that there

must be another interview under more favourable circumstances, before the whole case can be submitted?"

"I don't," said Lizzie, shaking her head, "understand your meaning, Mr. Headstone."

"Limit my meaning for the present," he interrupted, "to the whole case being submitted to you in another interview."

"What case, Mr. Headstone? What is wanting to it?"

"You — you shall be informed in the other interview." Then he said, as if in a burst of irrepressible despair, "I — I leave it all incomplete! There is a spell upon me, I think!" And then added, almost as if he asked for pity, "Good night!"

He held out his hand. As she, with manifest hesitation, not to say reluctance, touched it, a strange tremble passed over him, and his face, so deadly white, was moved as by a stroke of pain. Then he was gone.

The dolls' dressmaker sat with her attitude unchanged, eyeing the door by which he had departed, until Lizzie pushed her bench aside and sat down near her. Then, eyeing Lizzie as she had previously eyed Bradley and the door, Miss Wren chopped that very sudden and keen chop in which her jaws sometimes indulged, leaned back in her chair with folded arms, and thus expressed herself: —

"Humph! If he — I mean, of course, my dear, the party who is coming to court me when the time comes — should be *that* sort of man, he may spare himself the trouble. *He* would n't do to be trotted about and made useful. He 'd take fire and blow up while he was about it."

"And so you would be rid of him," said Lizzie, humouring her.

"Not so easily," returned Miss Wren. "He would n't blow up alone. He 'd carry me up with him. *I* know his tricks and his manners."

"Would he want to hurt you, do you mean?" asked Lizzie.

"Might n't exactly want to do it, my dear," returned Miss Wren; "but a lot of gunpowder among lighted lucifer-matches in the next room might almost as well be here."

"He is a very strange man," said Lizzie thoughtfully.

"I wish he was so very strange a man as to be a total stranger," answered the sharp little thing.

It being Lizzie's regular occupation when they were alone

of an evening to brush out and smooth the long fair hair of the dolls' dressmaker, she unfastened a ribbon that kept it back while the little creature was at her work, and it fell in a beautiful shower over the poor shoulders that were much in need of such adorning rain. "Not now, Lizzie dear," said Jenny; "let us have a talk by the fire." With those words, she in her turn loosened her friend's dark hair, and it dropped of its own weight over her bosom, in two rich masses. Pretending to compare the colours and admire the contrast, Jenny so managed a mere touch or two of her nimble hands, as that she herself laying a cheek on one of the dark folds seemed blinded by her own clustering curls to all but the fire, while the fine handsome face and brow of Lizzie were revealed without obstruction in the sober light.

"Let us have a talk," said Jenny, "about Mr. Eugene Wrayburn."

Something sparkled down among the fair hair resting on the dark hair; and if it were not a star — which it could n't be — it was an eye; and if it were an eye, it was Jenny Wren's eye, bright and watchful as the bird's whose name she had taken.

"Why about Mr. Wrayburn?" Lizzie asked.

"For no better reason than because I 'm in the humour. I wonder whether he 's rich!"

"No, not rich."

"Poor?"

"I think so, for a gentleman."

"Ah! To be sure! Yes, he 's a gentleman. Not of our sort; is he?"

A shake of the head, a thoughtful shake of the head, and the answer, softly spoken, "Oh no, oh no!"

The dolls' dressmaker had an arm round her friend's waist. Adjusting the arm, she slily took the opportunity of blowing at her own hair where it fell over her face; then the eye down there, under lighter shadows, sparkled more brightly and appeared more watchful.

"When He turns up, he shan't be a gentleman; I 'll very soon send him packing, if he is. However, he 's not Mr. Wrayburn; I have n't captivated *him*. I wonder whether anybody has, Lizzie!"

"It is very likely."

"Is it very likely? I wonder who!"

"Is it not very likely that some lady has been taken by him, and that he may love her dearly?"

"Perhaps. I don't know. What would you think of him, Lizzie, if you were a lady?"

"I a lady!" she repeated, laughing. "Such a fancy!"

"Yes. But say; just as a fancy, and for instance."

"I a lady! I, a poor girl who used to row poor father on the river. I, who had rowed poor father out and home on the very night when I saw him for the first time. I, who was made so timid by his looking at me, that I got up and went out!"

("He did look at you, even that night, though you were not a lady!" thought Miss Wren.)

"I a lady!" Lizzie went on in a low voice, with her eyes upon the fire. "I, with poor father's grave not even cleared of undeserved stain and shame, and he trying to clear it for me! I a lady!"

"Only as a fancy, and for instance," urged Miss Wren.

"Too much, Jenny dear, too much! My fancy is not able to get that far." As the low fire gleamed upon her, it showed her smiling, mournfully and abstractedly.

"But I am in the humour, and I must be humoured, Lizzie, because after all I am a poor little thing, and have had a hard day with my bad child. Look in the fire, as I like to hear you tell how you used to do when you lived in that dreary old house that had once been a windmill. Look in the — what was its name when you told fortunes with your brother that I *don't* like?"

"The hollow down by the flare?"

"Ah! That's the name! You can find a lady there, I know."

"More easily than I can make one of such material as myself, Jenny."

The sparkling eye looked steadfastly up, as the musing face looked thoughtfully down. "Well?" said the dolls' dressmaker, "we have found our lady?"

Lizzie nodded, and asked, "Shall she be rich?"

"She had better be, as he's poor."

"She is very rich. Shall she be handsome?"

"Even you can be that, Lizzie, so she ought to be."

"She is very handsome."

"What does she say about him?" asked Miss Jenny, in a low voice; watchful, through an intervening silence, of the face looking down at the fire.

"She is glad, glad, to be rich, that he may have the money. She is glad, glad, to be beautiful, that he may be proud of her. Her poor heart —"

"Eh? Her poor heart?" said Miss Wren.

"Her heart — is given him, with all its love and truth. She would joyfully die with him, or better than that, die for him. She knows he has failings, but she thinks they have grown up through his being like one cast away, for the want of something to trust in, and care for, and think well of. And she says, that lady rich and beautiful that I can never come near, 'Only put me in that empty place, only try how little I mind myself, only prove what a world of things I will do and bear for you, and I hope that you might even come to be much better than you are, through me who am so much worse, and hardly worth the thinking of beside you.'"

As the face looking at the fire had become exalted and forgetful in the rapture of these words, the little creature, openly clearing away her fair hair with her disengaged hand, had gazed at it with earnest attention and something like alarm. Now that the speaker ceased, the little creature laid down her head again, and moaned, "Oh me, Oh me, Oh me!"

"In pain, dear Jenny?" asked Lizzie, as if awakened.

"Yes, but not the old pain. Lay me down, lay me down. Don't go out of my sight to-night. Lock the door and keep close to me." Then turning away her face, she said in a whisper to herself, "My Lizzie, my poor Lizzie! O my blessed children, come back in the long bright slanting rows, and come for her, not me. She wants help more than I, my blessed children!"

She had stretched her hands up with that higher and better look, and now she turned again, and folded them round Lizzie's neck, and rocked herself on Lizzie's breast.

CHAPTER XII

MORE BIRDS OF PREY

Rogue Riderhood dwelt deep and dark in Limehouse Hole, among the riggers, and the mast, oar, and block makers, and the boat-builders, and the sail-lofts, as in a kind of ship's hold stored full of water-side characters, some no better than himself, some very much better, and none much worse. The Hole, albeit in a general way not over-nice in its choice of company, was rather shy in reference to the honour of cultivating the Rogue's acquaintance; more frequently giving him the cold shoulder than the warm hand, and seldom or never drinking with him unless at his own expense. A part of the Hole, indeed, contained so much public spirit and private virtue that not even this strong leverage could move it to good fellowship with a tainted accuser. But there may have been the drawback on this magnanimous morality, that its exponents held a true witness before Justice to be the next unneighbourly and accursed character to a false one.

Had it not been for the daughter whom he often mentioned, Mr. Riderhood might have found the Hole a mere grave as to any means it would yield him of getting a living. But Miss Pleasant Riderhood had some little position and connection in Limehouse Hole. Upon the smallest of small scales, she was an unlicensed pawnbroker, keeping what was popularly called a Leaving Shop, by lending insignificant sums on insignificant articles of property deposited with her as security. In her four-and-twentieth year of life, Pleasant was already in her fifth year of this way of trade. Her deceased mother had established the business, and on that parent's demise she had appropriated a secret capital of fifteen shillings to establish herself in it; the existence of such capital in a pillow being the last intelligible confidential communication made to her by the departed, before succumbing to dropsical conditions of snuff and gin, incompatible equally with coherence and existence.

Why christened Pleasant, the late Mrs. Riderhood might possibly have been at some time able to explain, and possibly not. Her daughter had no information on that point. Pleasant she found herself, and she could n't help it. She had not been consulted on the question, any more than on the question of her coming into these terrestrial parts, to want a name. Similarly, she found herself possessed of what is colloquially termed a swivel eye (derived from her father), which she might perhaps have declined if her sentiments on the subject had been taken. She was not otherwise positively ill-looking, though anxious, meagre, of a muddy complexion, and looking as old again as she really was.

As some dogs have it in the blood, or are trained, to worry certain creatures to a certain point, so — not to make the comparison disrespectfully — Pleasant Riderhood had it in the blood, or had been trained, to regard seamen, within certain limits, as her prey. Show her a man in a blue jacket, and, figuratively speaking, she pinned him instantly. Yet, all things considered, she was not of an evil mind or an unkindly disposition. For observe how many things were to be considered according to her own unfortunate experience. Show Pleasant Riderhood a Wedding in the street, and she only saw two people taking out a regular licence to quarrel and fight. Show her a Christening, and she saw a little heathen personage having a quite superfluous name bestowed upon it, inasmuch as it would be commonly addressed by some abusive epithet; which little personage was not in the least wanted by anybody, and would be shoved and banged out of everybody's way, until it should grow big enough to shove and bang. Show her a Funeral, and she saw an unremunerative ceremony in the nature of a black masquerade, conferring a temporary gentility on the performers, at an immense expense, and representing the only formal party ever given by the deceased. Show her a live father, and she saw but a duplicate of her own father, who from her infancy had been taken with fits and starts of discharging his duty to her, which duty was always incorporated in the form of a fist or a leathern strap, and being discharged hurt her. All things considered, therefore, Pleasant Riderhood was not so very, very bad. There was even a touch of romance in her — of such romance as could creep into Limehouse Hole — and maybe sometimes of a summer evening, when she stood with folded arms at

her shop door, looking from the reeking street to the sky where the sun was setting, she may have had some vaporous visions of far-off islands in the southern seas or elsewhere (not being geographically particular), where it would be good to roam with a congenial partner among groves of bread-fruit, waiting for ships to be wafted from the hollow ports of civilisation. For sailors to be got the better of were essential to Miss Pleasant's Eden.

Not on a summer evening did she come to her little shop door, when a certain man standing over against the house on the opposite side of the street took notice of her. That was on a cold, shrewd, windy evening, after dark. Pleasant Riderhood shared with most of the lady inhabitants of the Hole the peculiarity that her hair was a ragged knot, constantly coming down behind, and that she never could enter upon any undertaking without first twisting it into place. At that particular moment, being newly come to the threshold to take a look out of doors, she was winding herself up with both hands after this fashion. And so prevalent was the fashion that, on the occasion of a fight or other disturbance in the Hole, the ladies would be seen flocking from all quarters universally twisting their back-hair as they came along, and many of them, in the hurry of the moment, carrying their back-combs in their mouths.

It was a wretched little shop, with a roof that any man standing in it could touch with his hand; little better than a cellar or cave, down three steps. Yet in its ill-lighted window, among a flaring handkerchief or two, an old peacoat or so, a few valueless watches and compasses, a jar of tobacco and two crossed pipes, a bottle of walnut ketchup, and some horrible sweets, — these creature discomforts serving as a blind to the main business of the Leaving Shop, — was displayed the inscription SEAMAN'S BOARDING-HOUSE.

Taking notice of Pleasant Riderhood at the door, the man crossed so quickly that she was still winding herself up when he stood close before her.

"Is your father at home?" said he.

"I think he is," returned Pleasant, dropping her arms; "come in."

It was a tentative reply, the man having a seafaring appearance. Her father was not at home, and Pleasant knew it. "Take a seat by the fire," were her hospitable words when she had got him in; "men of your calling are always welcome here."

"Thankee," said the man.

His manner was the manner of a sailor, and his hands were the hands of a sailor, except that they were smooth. Pleasant had an eye for sailors, and she noticed the unused colour and texture of the hands, sunburnt though they were, as sharply as she noticed their unmistakable looseness and suppleness, as he sat himself down with his left arm carelessly thrown across his left leg a little above the knee, and the right arm as carelessly thrown over the elbow of the wooden chair, with the hand curved, half open and half shut, as if it had just let go a rope.

"Might you be looking for a Boarding-House?" Pleasant inquired, taking her observant stand on one side of the fire.

"I don't rightly know my plans yet," returned the man.

"You ain't looking for a Leaving Shop?"

"No," said the man.

"No," assented Pleasant, "you've got too much of an outfit on you for that. But if you should want either, this is both."

"Ay, ay!" said the man, glancing round the place. "I know. I've been here before."

"Did you Leave anything when you were here before?" asked Pleasant, with a view to principal and interest.

"No." The man shook his head.

"I am pretty sure you never boarded here?"

"No." The man again shook his head.

"What *did* you do here when you were here before?" asked Pleasant. "For I don't remember you."

"It's not at all likely you should. I only stood at the door, one night — on the lower step there — while a shipmate of mine looked in to speak to your father. I remember the place well." Looking very curiously round it.

"Might that have been long ago?"

"Ay, a goodish bit ago. When I came off my last voyage."

"Then you have not been to sea lately?"

"No. Been in the sick bay since then, and been employed ashore."

"Then, to be sure, that accounts for your hands."

The man with a keen look, a quick smile, and a change of manner, caught her up. "You're a good observer. Yes. That accounts for my hands."

Pleasant was somewhat disquieted by his look, and returned it suspiciously. Not only was his change of manner, though

Miss Riderhood at Home

very sudden, quite collected, but his former manner, which he resumed, had a certain suppressed confidence and sense of power in it that were half threatening.

"Will your father be long?" he inquired.

"I don't know. I can't say."

"As you supposed he was at home, it would seem that he has just gone out? How's that?"

"I supposed he had come home," Pleasant explained.

"Oh! You supposed he had come home? Then he has been some time out? How's that?"

"I don't want to deceive you. Father's on the river in his boat."

"At the old work?" asked the man.

"I don't know what you mean," said Pleasant, shrinking a step back. "What on earth d' ye want?"

"I don't want to hurt your father. I don't want to say I might, if I chose. I want to speak to him. Not much in that, is there? There shall be no secrets from you; you shall be by. And plainly, Miss Riderhood, there's nothing to be got out of me, or made of me. I am not good for the Leaving Shop, I am not good for the Boarding-House, I am not good for anything in your way to the extent of sixpenn'orth of halfpence. Put the idea aside, and we shall get on together."

"But you're a seafaring man?" argued Pleasant, as if that were a sufficient reason for his being good for something in her way.

"Yes and no. I have been, and I may be again. But I am not for you. Won't you take my word for it?"

The conversation had arrived at a crisis to justify Miss Pleasant's hair in tumbling down. It tumbled down accordingly, and she twisted it up, looking from under her bent forehead at the man. In taking stock of his familiarly worn, rough-weather, nautical clothes, piece by piece, she took stock of a formidable knife in a sheath at his waist ready to his hand, and of a whistle hanging round his neck, and of a short, jagged, knotted club with a loaded head that peeped out of a pocket of his loose outer jacket or frock. He sat quietly looking at her; but with these appendages partially revealing themselves, and with a quantity of bristling oakum-coloured head and whisker, he had a formidable appearance.

"Won't you take my word for it?" he asked again.

Pleasant answered with a short, dumb nod. He rejoined with another short, dumb nod. Then he got up and stood with his arms folded, in front of the fire, looking down into it occasionally, as she stood with her arms folded, leaning against the side of the chimney-piece.

"To while away the time till your father comes," he said, — "pray is there much robbing and murdering of seamen about the water-side now?"

"No," said Pleasant.

"Any?"

"Complaints of that sort are sometimes made, about Ratcliffe and Wapping, and up that way. But who knows how many are true?"

"To be sure. And it don't seem necessary."

"That's what I say," observed Pleasant. "Where's the reason for it? Bless the sailors, it ain't as if they ever could keep what they have without it."

"You're right. Their money may be soon got out of them without violence," said the man.

"Of course it may," said Pleasant; "and then they ship again, and get more. And the best thing for 'em, too, to ship again as soon as ever they can be brought to it. They're never so well off as when they're afloat."

"I'll tell you why I ask," pursued the visitor, looking up from the fire. "I was once beset that way myself, and left for dead."

"No?" said Pleasant. "Where did it happen?"

"It happened," returned the man, with a ruminative air, as he drew his right hand across his chin, and dipped the other in the pocket of his rough outer coat, — "it happened somewhere about here as I reckon. I don't think it can have been a mile from here."

"Were you drunk?" asked Pleasant.

"I was muddled, but not with fair drinking. I had not been drinking, you understand. A mouthful did it."

Pleasant, with a grave look, shook her head; importing that she understood the process, but decidedly disapproved.

"Fair trade is one thing," said she, "but that's another. No one has a right to carry on with Jack in *that* way."

"The sentiment does you credit," returned the man, with a grim smile; and added, in a mutter, "the more so, as I believe

it 's not your father's. — Yes, I had a bad time of it, that time. I lost everything, and had a sharp struggle for my life, weak as I was."

"Did you get the parties punished?" asked Pleasant.

"A tremendous punishment followed," said the man, more seriously; "but it was not of my bringing about."

"Of whose, then?" asked Pleasant.

The man pointed upward with his forefinger, and, slowly recovering that hand, settled his chin in it again as he looked at the fire. Bringing her inherited eye to bear upon him, Pleasant Riderhood felt more and more uncomfortable, his manner was so mysterious, so stern, so self-possessed.

"Anyways," said the damsel, "I am glad punishment followed, and I say so. Fair trade with seafaring men gets a bad name through deeds of violence. I am as much against deeds of violence being done to seafaring men as seafaring men can be themselves. I am of the same opinion as my mother was, when she was living. Fair trade, my mother used to say, but no robbery and no blows." In the way of trade Miss Pleasant would have taken — and, indeed, did take when she could — as much as thirty shillings a week for board that would be dear at five, and likewise conducted the Leaving business upon correspondingly equitable principles; yet she had that tenderness of conscience and those feelings of humanity that, the moment her ideas of trade were overstepped, she became the seaman's champion, even against her father, whom she seldom otherwise resisted.

But she was here interrupted by her father's voice exclaiming angrily, "Now, Poll Parrot!" and by her father's hat being heavily flung from his hand and striking her face. Accustomed to such occasional manifestations of his sense of parental duty, Pleasant merely wiped her face on her hair (which of course had tumbled down) before she twisted it up. This was another common procedure on the part of the ladies of the Hole, when heated by verbal or fistic altercation.

"Blest if I believe such a Poll Parrot as you was ever learned to speak!" growled Mr. Riderhood, stooping to pick up his hat, and making a feint at her with his head and right elbow; for he took the delicate subject of robbing seamen in extraordinary dudgeon, and was out of humour, too. "What are you Poll Parroting at now? Ain't you got nothing to do but fold your arms and stand a Poll Parroting all night?"

"Let her alone," urged the man. "She was only speaking to me."

"Let her alone, too!" retorted Mr. Riderhood, eyeing him all over. "Do you know she 's my daughter?"

"Yes."

"And don't you know that I won't have no Poll Parroting on the part of my daughter? No, nor yet that I won't take no Poll Parroting from no man? And who may *you* be, and what may *you* want?"

"How can I tell you until you are silent?" returned the other fiercely.

"Well," said Mr. Riderhood, quailing a little, "I am willing to be silent for the purpose of hearing. But don't Poll Parrot me."

"Are you thirsty, you?" the man asked, in the same fierce, short way, after returning his look.

"Why, nat'rally," said Mr. Riderhood, "ain't I always thirsty!" (Indignant at the absurdity of the question.)

"What will you drink?" demanded the man.

"Sherry wine," returned Mr. Riderhood, in the same sharp tone, "if you 're capable of it."

The man put his hand in his pocket, took out half a sovereign, and begged the favour of Miss Pleasant that she would fetch a bottle. "With the cork undrawn," he added, emphatically, looking at her father.

"I 'll take my Alfred David," muttered Mr. Riderhood, slowly relaxing into a dark smile, "that you know a move. Do *I* know *you?* N—n—no, I don't know you."

The man replied, "No, you don't know me." And so they stood looking at one another surlily enough, until Pleasant came back.

"There 's small glasses on the shelf," said Riderhood to his daughter. "Give me the one without a foot. I gets my living by the sweat of my brow, and it 's good enough for *me*." This had a modest, self-denying appearance; but it soon turned out that as, by reason of the impossibility of standing the glass upright while there was anything in it, it required to be emptied as soon as filled, Mr. Riderhood managed to drink in the proportion of three to one.

With his Fortunatus's goblet ready in his hand, Mr. Riderhood sat down on one side of the table before the fire, and the

strange man on the other; Pleasant occupying a stool between the latter and the fireside. The background, composed of handkerchiefs, coats, shirts, hats, and other old articles "On Leaving," had a general dim resemblance to human listeners; especially where a shiny black sou'-wester suit and hat hung, looking very like a clumsy mariner with his back to the c·n-pany, who was so curious to overhear, that he paused for the purpose with his coat half pulled on, and his shoulders up to his ears in the uncompleted action.

The visitor first held the bottle against the light of the candle, and next examined the top of the cork. Satisfied that it had not been tampered with, he slowly took from his breast-pocket a rusty clasp-knife, and, with a corkscrew in the handle, opened the wine. That done, he looked at the cork, unscrewed it from the corkscrew, laid each separately on the table, and, with the end of the sailor's knot of his neckerchief, dusted the inside of the neck of the bottle. All this with great deliberation.

At first Riderhood had sat with his footless glass extended at arm's length for filling, while the very deliberate stranger seemed absorbed in his preparations. But gradually his arm reverted home to him, and his glass was lowered and lowered until he rested it upside down upon the table. By the same degrees his attention became concentrated on the knife. And now, as the man held out the bottle to fill all round, Riderhood stood up, leaned over the table to look closer at the knife, and stared from it to him.

"What 's the matter?" asked the man.

"Why, I know that knife!" said Riderhood.

"Yes, I dare say you do."

He motioned to him to hold up his glass, and filled it. Riderhood emptied it to the last drop and began again.

"That there knife —"

"Stop," said the man composedly. "I was going to drink to your daughter. Your health, Miss Riderhood."

"That knife was the knife of a seaman named George Radfoot."

"It was."

"That seaman was well beknown to me."

"He was."

"What 's come to him?"

"Death has come to him. Death came to him in an ugly shape. He looked," said the man, "very horrible after it."

"Arter what?" said Riderhood, with a frowning stare.

"After he was killed."

"Killed? Who killed him?"

Only answering with a shrug, the man filled the footless glass, and Riderhood emptied it, looking amazedly from his daughter to his visitor.

"You don't mean to tell a honest man" — he was recommencing with his empty glass in his hand, when his eye became fascinated by the stranger's outer coat. He leaned across the table to see it nearer, touched the sleeve, turned the cuff to look at the sleeve-lining (the man, in his perfect composure, offering not the least objection), and exclaimed, "It's my belief as this here coat was George Radfoot's too!"

"You are right. He wore it the last time you ever saw him, and the last time you ever will see him — in this world."

"It's my belief you mean to tell me to my face you killed him!" exclaimed Riderhood; but, nevertheless, allowing his glass to be filled again.

The man only answered with another shrug, and showed no symptom of confusion.

"Wish I may die if I know what to be up to with this chap!" said Riderhood, after staring at him, and tossing his last glassful down his throat. "Let's know what to make of you. Say something plain."

"I will," returned the other, leaning forward across the table, and speaking in a low impressive voice. "What a liar you are!"

The honest witness rose, and made as though he would fling his glass in the man's face. The man not wincing, and merely shaking his forefinger half knowingly, half menacingly, the piece of honesty thought better of it and sat down again, putting the glass down too.

"And when you went to that lawyer yonder in the Temple with that invented story," said the stranger, in an exasperatingly comfortable sort of confidence, "you might have had your strong suspicions of a friend of your own, you know. I think you had, you know."

"Me my suspicions? Of what friend?"

"Tell me again whose knife was this?" demanded the man.

"It was possessed by, and was the property of — him as I have made mention on," said Riderhood, stupidly evading the actual mention of the name.

"Tell me again whose coat was this?"

"That there article of clothing likeways belonged to, and was wore by — him as I have made mention on," was again the dull Old Bailey evasion.

"I suspect that you gave him the credit of the deed, and of keeping cleverly out of the way. But there was small cleverness in *his* keeping out of the way. The cleverness would have been, to have got back for one single instant to the light of the sun."

"Things is come to a pretty pass," growled Mr. Riderhood, rising to his feet, goaded to stand at bay, "when bullyers as is wearing dead men's clothes, and bullyers as is armed with dead men's knives, is to come into the houses of honest live men, getting their livings by the sweats of their brows, and is to make these here sort of charges with no rhyme and no reason, neither the one nor yet the other! Why should I have had my suspicions of him?"

"Because you knew him," replied the man; "because you had been one with him, and knew his real character under a fair outside; because on the night which you had afterwards reason to believe to be the very night of the murder, he came in here, within an hour of his having left his ship in the docks, and asked you in what lodgings he could find room. Was there no stranger with him?"

"I 'll take my world-without-end everlasting Alfred David that YOU warn't with him," answered Riderhood. "You talk big, you do, but things look pretty black against yourself, to my thinking. You charge again' me that George Radfoot got lost sight of, and was no more thought of. What 's that for a sailor? Why, there 's fifty such, out of sight and out of mind, ten times as long as him — through entering in different names, re-shipping when the out'ard voyage is made, and what not — a turning up to light every day about here, and no matter made of it. Ask my daughter. You could go on Poll Parroting enough with her, when I warn't come in: Poll Parrot a little with her on this pint. You and your suspicions of my suspicions of him! What are my suspicions of you? You tell me George Radfoot got killed. I ask you who done it and how

you know it. You carry his knife and you wear his coat. I ask you how you come by 'em? Hand over that there bottle!" Here Mr. Riderhood appeared to labour under a virtuous delusion that it was his own property. "And you," he added, turning to his daughter, as he filled the footless glass, "if it warn't wasting good sherry wine on you, I 'd chuck this at you, for Poll Parroting with this man. It 's along of Poll Parroting that such-like as him gets their suspicions, whereas I gets mine by argueyment, and being nat'rally a honest man, and sweating away at the brow as an honest man ought." Here he filled the footless goblet again, and stood chewing one half of its contents and looking down into the other as he slowly rolled the wine about in the glass; while Pleasant, whose sympathetic hair had come down on her being apostrophised, rearranged it, much in the style of the tail of a horse when proceeding to market to be sold.

"Well? Have you finished?" asked the strange man.

"No," said Riderhood, "I ain't. Far from it. Now then! I want to know how George Radfoot come by his death, and how you come by his kit?"

"If you ever do know, you won't know now."

"And next I want to know," proceeded Riderhood, "whether you mean to charge that what-you-may-call-it murder —"

"Harmon murder, father," suggested Pleasant.

"No Poll Parroting!" he vociferated in return. "Keep your mouth shut! — I want to know, you sir, whether you charge that there crime on George Radfoot?"

"If you ever do know, you won't know now."

"Perhaps you done it yourself?" said Riderhood, with a threatening action.

"I alone know," returned the man, sternly shaking his head, "the mysteries of that crime. I alone know that your trumped-up story cannot possibly be true. I alone know that it must be altogether false, and that you must know it to be altogether false. I come here to-night to tell you so much of what I know, and no more."

Mr. Riderhood, with his crooked eye upon his visitor, meditated for some moments, and then refilled his glass, and tipped the contents down his throat in three tips.

"Shut the shop door!" he then said to his daughter, putting the glass suddenly down. "And turn the key and stand

by it! If you know all this, you sir," getting, as he spoke, between the visitor and the door, "why hain't you gone to Lawyer Lightwood?"

"That also is alone known to myself," was the cool answer.

"Don't you know that, if you did n't do the deed, what you say you could tell is worth from five to ten thousand pound?" asked Riderhood.

"I know it very well, and when I claim the money you shall share it."

The honest man paused, and drew a little nearer to the visitor, and a little further from the door.

"I know it," repeated the man quietly, "as well as I know that you and George Radfoot were one together in more than one dark business; and as well as I know that you, Roger Riderhood, conspired against an innocent man for blood-money; and as well as I know that I can — and that I swear I will! — give you up on both scores, and be the proof against you in my own person, if you defy me!"

"Father!" cried Pleasant from the door. "Don't defy him! Give way to him! Don't get into more trouble, father!"

"Will you leave off a Poll Parroting, I ask you?" cried Mr. Riderhood, half beside himself between the two. Then, propitiatingly and crawlingly: "You sir! You hain't said what you want of me. Is it fair, is it worthy of yourself, to talk of my defying you afore ever you say what you want of me?"

"I don't want much," said the man. "This accusation of yours must not be left half made and half unmade. What was done for the blood-money must be thoroughly undone."

"Well; but Shipmate —"

"Don't call me Shipmate," said the man.

"Captain, then," urged Mr. Riderhood; "there! You won't object to Captain. It 's a honourable title, and you fully look it. Captain! Ain't the man dead? Now I ask you fair. Ain't Gaffer dead?"

"Well," returned the other, with impatience, "yes, he is dead. What then?"

"Can words hurt a dead man, Captain? I only ask you fair."

"They can hurt the memory of a dead man, and they can hurt his living children. How many children had this man?"

"Meaning Gaffer, Captain?"

"Of whom else are we speaking?" returned the other, with a movement of his foot, as if Rogue Riderhood were beginning to sneak before him in the body as well as the spirit, and he spurned him off. "I have heard of a daughter, and a son. I ask for information; I ask *your* daughter; I prefer to speak to her. What children did Hexam leave?"

Pleasant, looking to her father for permission to reply, that honest man exclaimed with great bitterness: —

"Why the devil don't you answer the Captain? You can Poll Parrot enough when you ain't wanted to Poll Parrot, you perwerse jade!"

Thus encouraged, Pleasant explained that there were only Lizzie, the daughter in question, and the youth. Both very respectable, she added.

"It is dreadful that any stigma should attach to them," said the visitor, whom the consideration rendered so uneasy that he rose, and paced to and fro, muttering, "Dreadful! Unforeseen! How could it be foreseen!" Then he stopped, and asked aloud: "Where do they live?"

Pleasant further explained that only the daughter had resided with the father at the time of his accidental death, and that she had immediately afterwards quitted the neighbourhood.

"I know that," said the man, "for I have been to the place they dwelt in, at the time of the inquest. Could you quietly find out for me where she lives now?"

Pleasant had no doubt she could do that. Within what time, did she think? Within a day. The visitor said that was well, and he would return for the information, relying on its being obtained. To this dialogue Riderhood had attended in silence, and he now obsequiously bespake the Captain..

"Captain! Mentioning them unfort'net words of mine respecting Gaffer, it is contrairily to be bore in mind that Gaffer always were a precious rascal, and that his line were a thieving line. Likeways when I went to them two Governors, Lawyer Lightwood and the T' other Governor, with my information, I may have been a little over-eager for the cause of justice, or (to put it another way) a little over-stimilated by them feelings which rouses a man up, when a pot of money is going about, to get his hand into that pot of money for his family's sake. Besides which, I think the wine of them two Governors was —

I will not say a hocussed wine, but fur from a wine as was elthy for the mind. And there's another thing to be remembered, Captain. Did I stick to them words when Gaffer was no more, and did I say bold to them two Governors, 'Governors both, wot I informed I still inform; wot was took down I hold to?' No. I says, frank and open — no shuffling, mind you, Captain! — 'I may have been mistook, I've been a thinking of it, it may n't have been took down correct on this and that, and I won't swear to thick and thin, I'd rayther forfeit your good opinions than do it.' And so far as I know," concluded Mr. Riderhood, by way of proof and evidence to character, "I *have* actiwally forfeited the good opinions of several persons — even your own, Captain, if I understand your words — but I'd sooner do it than be forswore. There; if that's conspiracy, call me conspirator."

"You shall sign," said the visitor, taking very little heed of this oration, "a statement that it was all utterly false, and the poor girl shall have it. I will bring it with me for your signature, when I come again."

"When might you be expected, Captain?" inquired Riderhood, again dubiously getting between him and the door.

"Quite soon enough for you. I shall not disappoint you; don't be afraid."

"Might you be inclined to leave any name, Captain?"

"No, not at all. I have no such intention."

"'Shall' is summ'at of a hard word, Captain," urged Riderhood, still feebly dodging between him and the door, as he advanced. "When you say a man 'shall' sign this and that and t' other, Captain, you order him about in a grand sort of way. Don't it seem so to yourself?"

The man stood still, and angrily fixed him with his eyes.

"Father, father!" entreated Pleasant, from the door, with her disengaged hand nervously trembling at her lips; "don't! Don't get into trouble any more!"

"Hear me out, Captain, hear me out! All I was wishing to mention, Captain, afore you took your departer," said the sneaking Mr. Riderhood, falling out of his path, "was your handsome words relating to the reward."

"When I claim it," said the man, in a tone which seemed to leave some such words as "you dog," very distinctly understood, "you shall share it."

Looking steadfastly at Riderhood, he once more said in a low voice, this time with a grim sort of admiration of him as a perfect piece of evil, "What a liar you are!" and, nodding his head twice or thrice over the compliment, passed out of the shop. But to Pleasant he said good night kindly.

The honest man who gained his living by the sweat of his brow remained in a state akin to stupefaction, until the footless glass and the unfinished bottle conveyed themselves into his mind. From his mind he conveyed them into his hands, and so conveyed the last of the wine into his stomach. When that was done, he awoke to a clear perception that Poll Parroting was solely chargeable with what had passed. Therefore, not to be remiss in his duty as a father, he threw a pair of sea-boots at Pleasant, which she ducked to avoid, and then cried, poor thing, using her hair for a pocket-handkerchief.

CHAPTER XIII

A SOLO AND A DUETT

THE wind was blowing so hard when the visitor came out at the shop door into the darkness and dirt of Limehouse Hole that it almost blew him in again. Doors were slamming violently, lamps were flickering or blown out, signs were rocking in their frames, the water of the kennels, wind-dispersed, flew about in drops like rain. Indifferent to the weather, and even preferring it to better weather for its clearance of the streets, the man looked about him with a scrutinising glance. "Thus much I know," he murmured. "I have never been here since that night, and never was here before that night, but thus much I recognise. I wonder which way did we take when we came out of that shop. We turned to the right as I have turned, but I can recall no more. Did we go by this alley? Or down that little lane?"

He tried both, but both confused him equally, and he came straying back to the same spot. "I remember there were poles pushed out of upper windows on which clothes were drying, and I remember a low public-house, and the sound flowing down a narrow passage belonging to it, of the scraping of a fiddle and the shuffling of feet. But here are all these things in the lane, and here are all these things in the alley. And I have nothing else in my mind but a wall, a dark doorway, a flight of stairs, and a room."

He tried a new direction, but made nothing of it; walls, dark doorways, flights of stairs and rooms, were too abundant. And like most people so puzzled, he again and again described a circle, and found himself at the point from which he had begun. "This is like what I have read in narratives of escape from prison," said he, "where the little track of the fugitives in the night always seems to take the shape of the great round world on which they wander; as if it were a secret law."

Here he ceased to be the oakum-headed, oakum-whiskered

man on whom Miss Pleasant Riderhood had looked, and, allowing for his being still wrapped in a nautical overcoat, became as like that same lost, wanted Mr. Julius Handford as never man was like another in this world. In the breast of the coat he stowed the bristling hair and whisker, in a moment, as the favouring wind went with him down a solitary place that it had swept clear of passengers. Yet in that same moment he was the Secretary also, Mr. Boffin's Secretary. For John Rokesmith, too, was as like that same lost, wanted Mr. Julius Handford as never man was like another in this world.

"I have no clue to the scene of my death," said he. "Not that it matters now. But having risked discovery by venturing here at all, I should have been glad to track some part of the way." With which singular words he abandoned his search, came up out of Limehouse Hole, and took the way past Limehouse Church. At the great iron gate of the churchyard he stopped and looked in. He looked up at the high tower spectrally resisting the wind, and he looked round at the white tombstones, like enough to the dead in their winding-sheets, and he counted the nine tolls of the clock-bell.

"It is a sensation not experienced by many mortals," said he, "to be looking into a churchyard on a wild, windy night, and to feel that I no more hold a place among the living than these dead do, and even to know that I lie buried somewhere else, as they lie buried here. Nothing uses me to it. A spirit that was once a man could hardly feel stranger or lonelier, going unrecognised among mankind, than I feel.

"But this is the fanciful side of the situation. It has a real side, so difficult that, though I think of it every day, I never thoroughly think it out. Now, let me determine to think it out as I walk home. I know I evade it, as many men — perhaps most men — do evade thinking their way through their greatest perplexity. I will try to pin myself to mine. Don't evade it, John Harmon; don't evade it; think it out!

"When I came back to England, attracted to the country with which I had none but most miserable associations, by the accounts of my fine inheritance that found me abroad, I came back, shrinking from my father's money, shrinking from my father's memory, mistrustful of being forced on a mercenary wife, mistrustful of my father's intention in thrusting that

marriage on me, mistrustful that I was already growing avaricious, mistrustful that I was slackening in gratitude to the two dear, noble, honest friends who had made the only sunlight in my childish life or that of my heart-broken sister. I came back, timid, divided in my mind, afraid of myself and everybody here, knowing of nothing but wretchedness that my father's wealth had ever brought about. Now, stop, and so far think it out, John Harmon. Is that so? That is exactly so.

"On board serving as third mate was George Radfoot. I knew nothing of it. His name first became known to me about a week before we sailed, through my being accosted by one of the ship-agent's clerks as 'Mr. Radfoot.' It was one day when I had gone aboard to look to my preparations, and the clerk, coming behind me as I stood on deck, tapped me on the shoulder, and said, 'Mr. Radfoot, look here,' referring to some papers that he had in his hand. And my name first became known to Radfoot, through another clerk within a day or two, and while the ship was yet in port, coming up behind him, tapping him on the shoulder, and beginning, 'I beg your pardon, Mr. Harmon —' I believe we were alike in bulk and stature but not otherwise, and that we were not strikingly alike, even in those respects, when we were together and could be compared.

"However, a sociable word or two on these mistakes became an easy introduction between us, and the weather was hot, and he helped me to a cool cabin on deck alongside his own, and his first school had been at Brussels as mine had been, and he had learnt French as I had learnt it, and he had a little history of himself to relate — God only knows how much of it true, and how much of it false — that had its likeness to mine. I had been a seaman, too. So we got to be confidential together, and the more easily yet, because he and every one on board had known by general rumour what I was making the voyage to England for. By such degrees and means, he came to the knowledge of my uneasiness of mind, and of its setting at that time in the direction of desiring to see and form some judgment of my allotted wife, before she could possibly know me for myself; also to try Mrs. Boffin and give her a glad surprise. So the plot was made out of our getting common sailors' dresses (as he was able to guide me about London), and throwing ourselves in Bella Wilfer's neighbourhood, and trying to put

ourselves in her way, and doing whatever chance might favour on the spot, and seeing what came of it. If nothing came of it, I should be no worse off, and there would merely be a short delay in my presenting myself to Lightwood. I have all these facts right? Yes. They are all accurately right.

"His advantage in all this was that for a time I was to be lost. It might be for a day or for two days, but I must be lost sight of on landing, or there would be recognition, anticipation, and failure. Therefore, I disembarked with my valise in my hand — as Potterson the steward and Mr. Jacob Kibble my fellow-passenger afterwards remembered — and waited for him in the dark by that very Limehouse Church which is now behind me.

"As I had always shunned the port of London, I only knew the church through his pointing out its spire from on board. Perhaps I might recall, if it were any good to try, the way by which I went to it alone from the river; but how we two went from it to Riderhood's shop, I don't know — any more than I know what turns we took and doubles we made, after we left it. The way was purposely confused, no doubt.

"But let me go on thinking the facts out, and avoid confusing them with my speculations. Whether he took me by a straight way or a crooked way, what is that to the purpose now? Steady, John Harmon.

"When we stopped at Riderhood's, and he asked that scoundrel a question or two, purporting to refer only to the lodging-houses in which there was accommodation for us, had I the least suspicion of him? None. Certainly none until afterwards when I held the clue. I think he must have got from Riderhood in a paper, the drug, or whatever it was, that afterwards stupefied me, but I am far from sure. All I felt safe in charging on him to-night was old companionship in villainy between them. Their undisguised intimacy, and the character I now know Riderhood to bear, made that not at all adventurous. But I am not clear about the drug. Thinking out the circumstances on which I found my suspicion, they are only two. One: I remember his changing a small folded paper from one pocket to another, after we came out, which he had not touched before. Two: I now know Riderhood to have been previously taken up for being concerned in the robbery of an unlucky seaman, to whom some such poison had been given.

"It is my conviction that we cannot have gone a mile from that shop before we came to the wall, the dark doorway, the flight of stairs, and the room. The night was particularly dark, and it rained hard. As I think the circumstances back, I hear the rain splashing on the stone pavement of the passage, which was not under cover. The room overlooked the river, or a dock, or a creek, and the tide was out. Being possessed of the time down to that point, I know by the hour that it must have been about low water; but while the coffee was getting ready, I drew back the curtain (a dark-brown curtain), and, looking out, knew by the kind of reflection below, of the few neighbouring lights, that they were reflected in tidal mud.

"He had carried under his arm a canvas bag, containing a suit of his clothes. I had no change of outer clothes with me, as I was to buy slops. 'You are very wet, Mr. Harmon,' — I can hear him saying, — 'and I am quite dry under this good waterproof coat. Put on these clothes of mine. You may find on trying them that they will answer your purpose to-morrow as well as the slops you mean to buy, or better. While you change, I'll hurry the hot coffee.' When he came back, I had his clothes on, and there was a black man with him, wearing a linen jacket, like a steward, who put the smoking coffee on the table in a tray and never looked at me. I am so far literal and exact? Literal and exact, I am certain.

"Now, I pass to sick and deranged impressions; they are so strong that I rely upon them; but there are spaces between them that I know nothing about, and they are not pervaded by any idea of time.

"I had drank some coffee, when to my sense of sight he began to swell immensely, and something urged me to rush at him. We had a struggle near the door. He got from me, through my not knowing where to strike, in the whirling round of the room, and the flashing of flames of fire between us. I dropped down. Lying helpless on the ground, I was turned over by a foot. I was dragged by the neck into a corner. I heard men speak together. I was turned over by other feet. I saw a figure like myself lying dressed in my clothes on a bed. What might have been, for anything I knew, a silence of days, weeks, months, years, was broken by a violent wrestling of men all over the room. The figure like myself was assailed, and my valise was in its hand. I was trodden upon and fallen over. I

heard a noise of blows, and thought it was a wood-cutter cutting down a tree. I could not have said that my name was John Harmon — I could not have thought it — I did n't know it — but when I heard the blows, I thought of the wood-cutter and his axe, and had some dead idea that I was lying in a forest.

"This is still correct? Still correct, with the exception that I cannot possibly express it to myself without using the word I. But it was not I. There was no such thing as I, within my knowledge.

"It was only after a downward slide through something like a tube, and then a great noise and a sparkling and crackling as of fires, that the consciousness came upon me, 'This is John Harmon drowning! John Harmon, struggle for your life. John Harmon, call on Heaven and save yourself!' I think I cried it out aloud in a great agony, and then a heavy, horrid, unintelligible something vanished, and it was I who was struggling there alone in the water.

"I was very weak and faint, frightfully oppressed with drowsiness, and driving fast with the tide. Looking over the black water, I saw the lights racing past me on the two banks of the river, as if they were eager to be gone and leave me dying in the dark. The tide was running down, but I knew nothing of up or down then. When, guiding myself safely with Heaven's assistance before the fierce set of the water, I at last caught at a boat moored, one of a tier of boats at a causeway, I was sucked under her, and came up, only just alive, on the other side.

"Was I long in the water? Long enough to be chilled to the heart, but I don't know how long. Yet the cold was merciful, for it was the cold night air and the rain that restored me from a swoon on the stones of the causeway. They naturally supposed me to have toppled in, drunk, when I crept to the public-house it belonged to; for I had no notion where I was, and could not articulate — through the poison that had made me insensible having affected my speech — and I supposed the night to be the previous night, as it was still dark and raining. But I had lost twenty-four hours.

"I have checked the calculation often, and it must have been two nights that I lay recovering in that public-house. Let me see. Yes. I am sure it was while I lay in that bed there that the thought entered my head of turning the danger I had

passed through to the account of being for some time supposed to have disappeared mysteriously, and of proving Bella. The dread of our being forced on one another, and perpetuating the fate that seemed to have fallen on my father's riches, — the fate that they should lead to nothing but evil, — was strong upon the moral timidity that dates from my childhood with my poor sister.

"As to this hour I cannot understand that side of the river where I recovered the shore, being the opposite side to that on which I was ensnared, I shall never understand it now. Even at this moment, while I leave the river behind me, going home, I cannot conceive that it rolls between me and that spot, or that the sea is where it is. But this is not thinking it out; this is making a leap to the present time.

"I could not have done it, but for the fortune in the waterproof belt round my body. Not a great fortune, forty and odd pounds for the inheritor of a hundred and odd thousand! But it was enough. Without it, I must have disclosed myself. Without it, I could never have gone to that Exchequer Coffee House, or taken Mrs. Wilfer's lodgings.

"Some twelve days I lived at that hotel, before the night when I saw the corpse of Radfoot at the Police Station. The inexpressible mental horror that I laboured under, as one of the consequences of the poison, makes the interval seem greatly longer, but I know it cannot have been longer. That suffering has gradually weakened and weakened since, and has only come upon me by starts, and I hope I am free from it now; but even now, I have sometimes to think, constrain myself, and stop before speaking, or I could not say the words I want to say.

"Again I ramble away from thinking it out to the end. It is not so far to the end that I need be tempted to break off. Now, on straight!

"I examined the newspapers every day for tidings that I was missing, but saw none. Going out that night to walk (for I kept retired while it was light), I found a crowd assembled round a placard posted at Whitehall. It described myself, John Harmon, as found dead and mutilated in the river under circumstances of strong suspicion, described my dress, described the papers in my pockets, and stated where I was lying for recognition. In a wild, incautious way I hurried there, and there — with the horror of the death I had escaped before my

eyes in its most appalling shape, added to the inconceivable horror tormenting me at that time when the poisonous stuff was strongest on me — I perceived that Radfoot had been murdered by some unknown hands for the money for which he would have murdered me, and that probably we had both been shot into the river from the same dark place into the same dark tide, when the stream ran deep and strong.

"That night I almost gave up my mystery, though I suspected no one, could offer no information, knew absolutely nothing save that the murdered man was not I, but Radfoot. Next day while I hesitated, and next day while I hesitated, it seemed as if the whole country were determined to have me dead. The Inquest declared me dead, the Government proclaimed me dead; I could not listen at my fireside for five minutes to the outer noises, but it was borne into my ears that I was dead.

"So John Harmon died, and Julius Handford disappeared, and John Rokesmith was born. John Rokesmith's intent to-night has been to repair a wrong that he could never have imagined possible, coming to his ears through the Lightwood talk related to him, and which he is bound by every consideration to remedy. In that intent John Rokesmith will persevere, as his duty is.

"Now, is it all thought out? All to this time? Nothing omitted? No, nothing. But beyond this time? To think it out through the future is a harder though a much shorter task than to think it out through the past. John Harmon is dead. Should John Harmon come to life?

"If yes, why? If no, why?

"Take yes, first. To enlighten human justice concerning the offence of one far beyond it who may have a living mother. To enlighten it with the lights of a stone passage, a flight of stairs, a brown window-curtain, and a black man. To come into possession of my father's money, and with it sordidly to buy a beautiful creature whom I love, — I cannot help it; reason has nothing to do with it; I love her against reason, — but who would as soon love me for my own sake as she would love the beggar at the corner. What a use for the money, and how worthy of its old misuses!

"Now, take no. The reasons why John Harmon should not come to life. Because he has passively allowed these dear old faithful friends to pass into possession of the property. Because

he sees them happy with it, making a good use of it, effacing the old rust and tarnish on the money. Because they have virtually adopted Bella, and will provide for her. Because there is affection enough in her nature, and warmth enough in her heart, to develop into something endearingly good, under favourable conditions. Because her faults have been intensified by her place in my father's will, and she is already growing better. Because her marriage with John Harmon, after what I have heard from her own lips, would be a shocking mockery, of which both she and I must always be conscious, and which would degrade her in her mind, and me in mine, and each of us in the other's. Because, if John Harmon comes to life and does not marry her, the property falls into the very hands that hold it now.

"What would I have? Dead, I have found the true friends of my lifetime still as true, as tender, and as faithful as when I was alive, and making my memory an incentive to good actions done in my name. Dead, I have found them when they might have slighted my name, and passed greedily over my grave to ease and wealth, lingering by the way, like single-hearted children, to recall their love for me when I was a poor frightened child. Dead, I have heard from the woman who would have been my wife, if I had lived, the revolting truth that I should have purchased her, caring nothing for me, as a Sultan buys a slave.

"What would I have? If the dead could know, or do know, how the living use them, who among the hosts of dead has found a more disinterested fidelity on earth than I? Is not that enough for me? If I had come back, these noble creatures would have welcomed me, wept over me, given up everything to me with joy. I did not come back, and they have passed unspoiled into my place. Let them rest, and let Bella rest in hers.

"What course for me, then? This. To live the same quiet Secretary life, carefully avoiding chances of recognition until they shall have become more accustomed to their altered state, and until the great swarm of swindlers under many names shall have found newer prey. By that time, the method I am establishing through all the affairs, and with which I will every day take new pains to make them both familiar, will be, I may hope, a machine in such working order as that they can keep it going. I know I need but ask of their generosity, to have.

When the right time comes, I will ask no more than will replace me in my former path of life, and John Rokesmith shall tread it as contentedly as he may. But John Harmon shall come back no more.

"That I may never, in the days to come afar off, have any weak misgiving that Bella might, in any contingency, have taken me for my own sake if I had plainly asked her, I *will* plainly ask her; proving beyond all question what I already know too well. And now it is all thought out, from the beginning to the end, and my mind is easier."

So deeply engaged had the living-dead man been, in thus communing with himself, that he had regarded neither the wind nor the way, and had resisted the former as instinctively as he had pursued the latter. But being now come into the City, where there was a coach-stand, he stood irresolute whether to go to his lodgings, or to go first to Mr. Boffin's house. He decided to go round by the house, arguing, as he carried his overcoat upon his arm, that it was less likely to attract notice if left there than if taken to Holloway; both Mrs. Wilfer and Miss Lavinia being ravenously curious touching every article of which the lodger stood possessed.

Arriving at the house, he found that Mr. and Mrs. Boffin were out, but that Miss Wilfer was in the drawing-room. Miss Wilfer had remained at home, in consequence of not feeling very well, and had inquired in the evening if Mr. Rokesmith were in his room.

"Make my compliments to Miss Wilfer and say I am here now."

Miss Wilfer's compliments came down in return, and, if it were not too much trouble, would Mr. Rokesmith be so kind as to come up before he went?

It was not too much trouble, and Mr. Rokesmith came up.

Oh, she looked very pretty, she looked very, very pretty! If the father of the late John Harmon had but left his money unconditionally to his son, and if his son had but lighted on this lovable girl for himself, and had the happiness to make her loving as well as lovable!

"Dear me! Are you not well, Mr. Rokesmith?"

"Yes, quite well. I was sorry to hear, when I came in, that *you* were not."

"A mere nothing. I had a headache — gone now — and was not quite fit for a hot theatre, so I stayed at home. I asked you if you were not well, because you look so white."

"Do I? I have had a busy evening."

She was on a low ottoman before the fire, with a little shining jewel of a table, and her book and her work, beside her. Ah! what a different life the late John Harmon's, if it had been his happy privilege to take his place upon that ottoman, and draw his arm about that waist, and say, "I hope the time has been long without me? What a Home Goddess you look, my darling!"

But the present John Rokesmith, far removed from the late John Harmon, remained standing at a distance. A little distance in respect of space, but a great distance in respect of separation.

"Mr. Rokesmith," said Bella, taking up her work, and inspecting it all round the corners, "I wanted to say something to you when I could have the opportunity, as an explanation why I was rude to you the other day. You have no right to think ill of me, sir."

The sharp little way in which she darted a look at him half sensitively injured, and half pettishly, would have been very much admired by the late John Harmon.

"You don't know how well I think of you, Miss Wilfer."

"Truly you must have a very high opinion of me, Mr. Rokesmith, when you believe that in prosperity I neglect and forget my old home."

"Do I believe so?"

"You *did*, sir, at any rate," returned Bella.

"I took the liberty of reminding you of a little omission into which you had fallen — insensibly and naturally fallen. It was no more than that."

"And I beg leave to ask you, Mr. Rokesmith," said Bella, "why you took that liberty? — I hope there is no offence in the phrase; it is your own, remember."

"Because I am truly, deeply, profoundly interested in you, Miss Wilfer. Because I wish to see you always at your best. Because I — shall I go on?"

"No, sir," returned Bella, with a burning face, "you have said more than enough. I beg that you will *not* go on. If you have any generosity, any honour, you will say no more."

The late John Harmon, looking at the proud face with the downcast eyes, and at the quick breathing as it stirred the fall of bright brown hair over the beautiful neck, would probably have remained silent.

"I wish to speak to you, sir," said Bella, "once for all, and I don't know how to do it. I have sat here all this evening, wishing to speak to you, and determining to speak to you, and feeling that I must. I beg for a moment's time."

He remained silent, and she remained with her face averted, sometimes making a slight movement as if she would turn and speak. At length she did so.

"You know how I am situated here, sir, and you know how I am situated at home. I must speak to you for myself, since there is no one about me whom I could ask to do so. It is not generous in you, it is not honourable in you, to conduct yourself towards me as you do."

"Is it ungenerous or dishonourable to be devoted to you; fascinated by you?"

"Preposterous!" said Bella.

The late John Harmon might have thought it rather a contemptuous and lofty word of repudiation.

"I now feel obliged to go on," pursued the Secretary, "though it were only in self-explanation and self-defence. I hope, Miss Wilfer, that it is not unpardonable — even in me — to make an honest declaration of an honest devotion to you."

"An honest declaration!" repeated Bella, with emphasis.

"Is it otherwise?"

"I must request, sir," said Bella, taking refuge in a touch of timely resentment, "that I may not be questioned. You must excuse me if I decline to be cross-examined."

"Oh, Miss Wilfer, this is hardly charitable. I ask you nothing but what your own emphasis suggests. However, I waive even that question. But what I have declared, I take my stand by. I cannot recall the avowal of my earnest and deep attachment to you, and I do not recall it."

"I reject it, sir," said Bella.

"I should be blind and deaf if I were not prepared for the reply. Forgive my offence, for it carries its punishment with it."

"What punishment?" asked Bella.

"Is my present endurance none? But excuse me; I did not mean to cross-examine you again."

"You take advantage of a hasty word of mine," said Bella, with a little sting of self-reproach, "to make me seem — I don't know what. I spoke without consideration when I used it. If that was bad, I am sorry; but you repeat it after consideration, and that seems to me to be at least no better. For the rest, I beg it may be understood, Mr. Rokesmith, that there is an end of this between us, now and for ever."

"Now and for ever," he repeated.

"Yes. I appeal to you, sir," proceeded Bella, with increasing spirit, "not to pursue me. I appeal to you not to take advantage of your position in this house to make my position in it distressing and disagreeable. I appeal to you to discontinue your habit of making your misplaced attentions as plain to Mrs. Boffin as to me."

"Have I done so?"

"I should think you have," replied Bella. "In any case it is not your fault if you have not, Mr. Rokesmith."

"I hope you are wrong in that impression. I should be very sorry to have justified it. I think I have not. For the future there is no apprehension. It is all over."

"I am much relieved to hear it," said Bella. "I have far other views in life, and why should you waste your own?"

"Mine!" said the Secretary. "My life!"

His curious tone caused Bella to glance at the curious smile with which he said it. It was gone as he glanced back. "Pardon me, Miss Wilfer," he proceeded, when their eyes met; "you have used some hard words, for which I do not doubt you have a justification in your mind, that I do not understand. Ungenerous and dishonourable. In what?"

"I would rather not be asked," said Bella, haughtily looking down.

"I would rather not ask, but the question is imposed upon me. Kindly explain; or if not kindly, justly."

"Oh, sir!" said Bella, raising her eyes to his, after a little struggle to forbear, "is it generous and honourable to use the power here which your favour with Mr. and Mrs. Boffin and your ability in your place give you, against me?"

"Against you?"

"Is it generous and honourable to form a plan for gradually

bringing their influence to bear upon a suit which I have shown you that I do not like, and which I tell you that I utterly reject?"

The late John Harmon could have borne a good deal, but he would have been cut to the heart by such a suspicion as this.

"Would it be generous and honourable to step into your place — if you did so, for I don't know that you did, and I hope you did not — anticipating, or knowing beforehand, that I should come here, and designing to take me at this disadvantage?"

"This mean and cruel disadvantage," said the Secretary.

"Yes," assented Bella.

The Secretary kept silence for a little while; then merely said, "You are wholly mistaken, Miss Wilfer; wonderfully mistaken. I cannot say, however, that it is your fault. If I deserve better things of you, you do not know it."

"At least, sir," retorted Bella, with her old indignation rising, "you know the history of my being here at all. I have heard Mr. Boffin say that you are master of every line and word of that will, as you are master of all his affairs. And was it not enough that I should have been willed away like a horse, or a dog, or a bird; but must you too begin to dispose of me in your mind, and speculate in me, as soon as I had ceased to be the talk and the laugh of the town? Am I for ever to be made the property of strangers?"

"Believe me," returned the Secretary, "you are wonderfully mistaken."

"I should be glad to know it," answered Bella.

"I doubt if you ever will. Good night. Of course I shall be careful to conceal any traces of this interview from Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, as long as I remain here. Trust me, what you have complained of is at an end for ever."

"I am glad I have spoken, then, Mr. Rokesmith. It has been painful and difficult, but it is done. If I have hurt you, I hope you will forgive me. I am inexperienced and impetuous, and I have been a little spoilt; but I really am not so bad as I dare say I appear, or as you think me."

He quitted the room when Bella had said this, relenting in her wilful, inconsistent way. Left alone, she threw herself back on her ottoman, and said, "I did n't know the lovely woman was such a Dragon!" Then she got up and looked in the glass,

and said to her image, "You have been positively swelling your features, you little fool!" Then she took an impatient walk to the other end of the room and back, and said, "I wish pa was here to have a talk about an avaricious marriage; but he is better away, poor dear, for I know I should pull his hair if he *was* here." And then she threw her work away, and threw her book after it, and sat down and hummed a tune, and hummed it out of tune, and quarrelled with it.

And John Rokesmith, what did he?

He went down to his room, and buried John Harmon many additional fathoms deep. He took his hat, and walked out, and, as he went to Holloway or anywhere else, — not at all minding where, — heaped mounds upon mounds of earth over John Harmon's grave. His walking did not bring him home until the dawn of day. And so busy had he been all night, piling and piling weights upon weights of earth above John Harmon's grave, that by that time John Harmon lay buried under a whole Alpine range; and still the Sexton Rokesmith accumulated mountains over him, lightening his labour with the dirge, "Cover him, crush him, keep him down!"

CHAPTER XIV

STRONG OF PURPOSE

THE sexton task of piling earth above John Harmon all night long was not conducive to sound sleep; but Rokesmith had some broken morning rest, and rose strengthened in his purpose. It was all over now. No ghost should trouble Mr. and Mrs. Boffin's peace; invisible and voiceless, the ghost should look on for a little while longer at the state of existence out of which it had departed, and then should for ever cease to haunt the scenes in which it had no place.

He went over it all again. He had lapsed into the condition in which he found himself, as many a man lapses into many a condition, without perceiving the accumulative power of its separate circumstances. When in the distrust engendered by his wretched childhood and the action for evil — never yet for good within his knowledge then — of his father and his father's wealth on all within their influence, he conceived the idea of his first deception, it was meant to be harmless, it was to last but a few hours or days, it was to involve in it only the girl so capriciously forced upon him, and upon whom he was so capriciously forced, and it was honestly meant well towards her. For if he had found her unhappy in the prospect of that marriage (through her heart inclining to another man or for any other cause), he would seriously have said: "This is another of the old perverted uses of the misery-making money. I will let it go to my and my sister's only protectors and friends." When the snare into which he fell so outstripped his first intention as that he found himself placarded by the police authorities upon the London walls for dead, he confusedly accepted the aid that fell upon him, without considering how firmly it must seem to fix the Boffins in their accession to the fortune. When he saw them, and knew them, and even from his vantage-ground of inspection could find no flaw in them, he asked himself, "And shall I come to life to dispossess such people as these?"

There was no good to set against the putting of them to that hard proof. He had heard from Bella's own lips when he stood tapping at the door on that night of his taking the lodgings that the marriage would have been on her part thoroughly mercenary. He had since tried her, in his own unknown person and supposed station, and she not only rejected his advances but resented them. Was it for him to have the shame of buying her, or the meanness of punishing her? Yet, by coming to life and accepting the condition of the inheritance, he must do the former; and by coming to life and rejecting it, he must do the latter.

Another consequence that he had never foreshadowed was the implication of an innocent man in his supposed murder. He would obtain complete retraction from the accuser, and set the wrong right; but clearly the wrong could never have been done if he had never planned a deception. Then, whatever inconvenience or distress of mind the deception cost him, it was manful repentantly to accept as among its consequences, and make no complaint.

Thus John Rokesmith in the morning, and it buried John Harmon still many fathoms deeper than he had been buried in the night.

Going out earlier than he was accustomed to do, he encountered the cherub at the door. The cherub's way was for a certain space his way, and they walked together.

It was impossible not to notice the change in the cherub's appearance. The cherub felt very conscious of it, and modestly remarked: "A present from my daughter Bella, Mr. Rokesmith."

The words gave the Secretary a stroke of pleasure, for he remembered the fifty pounds, and he still loved the girl. No doubt it was very weak — it always *is* very weak, some authorities hold — but he loved the girl.

"I don't know whether you happen to have read many books of African Travel, Mr. Rokesmith?" said R. W.

"I have read several."

"Well, you know, there 's usually a King George, or a King Boy, or a King Sambo, or a King Bill, or Bull, or Rum, or Junk, or whatever name the sailors may have happened to give him."

"Where?" asked Rokesmith.

"Anywhere. Anywhere in Africa, I mean. Pretty well everywhere, I may say; for black kings are cheap — and *I* think," said R. W., with an apologetic air, "nasty."

"I am much of your opinion, Mr. Wilfer. You were going to say — "

"I was going to say, the king is generally dressed in a London hat only, or a Manchester pair of braces, or one epaulette, or an uniform coat with his legs in the sleeves, or something of that kind."

"Just so," said the Secretary.

"In confidence, I assure you, Mr. Rokesmith," observed the cheerful cherub, "that when more of my family were at home and to be provided for, I used to remind myself immensely of that king. You have no idea, as a single man, of the difficulty I have had in wearing more than one good article at a time."

"I can easily believe it, Mr. Wilfer."

"I only mention it," said R. W., in the warmth of his heart, "as a proof of the amiable, delicate, and considerate affection of my daughter Bella. If she had been a little spoilt, I could n't have thought so very much of it, under the circumstances. But no, not a bit. And she is so very pretty! I hope you agree with me in finding her very pretty, Mr. Rokesmith?"

"Certainly I do. Every one must."

"I hope so," said the cherub. "Indeed, I have no doubt of it. This is a great advancement for her in life, Mr. Rokesmith. A great opening of her prospects?"

"Miss Wilfer could have no better friends than Mr. and Mrs. Boffin."

"Impossible!" said the gratified cherub. "Really I begin to think things are very well as they are. If Mr. John Harmon had lived — "

"He is better dead," said the Secretary.

"No, I won't go so far as to say that," urged the cherub, a little remonstrant against the very decisive and unpitying tone; "but he might n't have suited Bella, or Bella might n't have suited him, or fifty things, whereas now I hope she can choose for herself."

"Has she — as you place the confidence in me of speaking on the subject, you will excuse my asking — has she — perhaps — chosen?" faltered the Secretary.

"Oh, dear, no!" returned R. W.

"Young ladies sometimes," Rokesmith hinted, "choose without mentioning their choice to their fathers."

"Not in this case, Mr. Rokesmith. Between my daughter Bella and me there is a regular league and covenant of confidence. It was ratified only the other day. The ratification dates from — these," said the cherub, giving a little pull at the lapels of his coat and the pockets of his trousers. "Oh, no, she has not chosen. To be sure, young George Sampson, in the days when Mr. John Harmon —"

"Who I wish had never been born!" said the Secretary, with a gloomy brow.

R. W. looked at him with surprise, as thinking he had contracted an unaccountable spite against the poor deceased, and continued: "In the days when Mr. John Harmon was being sought out, young George Sampson certainly was hovering about Bella, and Bella let him hover. But it never was seriously thought of, and it 's still less than ever to be thought of now. For Bella is ambitious, Mr. Rokesmith, and I think I may predict will marry fortune. This time, you see, she will have the person and the property before her together, and will be able to make her choice with her eyes open. This is my road. I am very sorry to part company so soon. Good morning, sir!"

The Secretary pursued his way, not very much elevated in spirits by this conversation, and, arriving at the Boffin mansion, found Betty Higden waiting for him.

"I should thank you kindly, sir," said Betty, "if I might make so bold as have a word or two wi' you."

She should have as many words as she liked, he told her; and took her into his room, and made her sit down.

"'T is concerning Sloppy, sir," said Betty. "And that 's how I come here by myself. Not wishing him to know what I 'm a going to say to you, I got the start of him early, and walked up."

"You have wonderful energy," returned Rokesmith. "You are as young as I am."

Betty Higden gravely shook her head. "I am strong for my time of life, sir, but not young, thank the Lord!"

"Are you thankful for not being young?"

"Yes, sir. If I was young, it would all have to be gone through again, and the end would be a weary way off, don't you see? But never mind me; 't is concerning Sloppy."

"And what about him, Betty?"

"'T is just this, sir. It can't be reasoned out of his head by any powers of mine but what that he can do right by your kind lady and gentleman and do his work for me, both together. Now he can't. To give himself up to being put in the way of arning a good living and getting on, he must give me up. Well; he won't."

"I respect him for it," said Rokesmith.

"*Do* ye, sir? I don't know but what I do myself. Still that don't make it right to let him have his way. So as he won't give me up, I 'm a going to give him up."

"How, Betty?"

"I 'm a going to run away from him."

With an astonished look at the indomitable old face and the bright eyes, the Secretary repeated, "Run away from him?"

"Yes, sir," said Betty, with one nod. And in the nod and in the firm set of her mouth, there was a vigour of purpose not to be doubted.

"Come, come!" said the Secretary. "We must talk about this. Let us take our time over it, and try to get at the true sense of the case and the true course by degrees."

"Now, lookee here, my dear," returned old Betty — "asking your excuse for being so familiar, but being of a time of life a'most to be your grandmother twice over. Now, lookee here. 'T is a poor living and a hard as is to be got out of this work that I 'm a doing now, and but for Sloppy I don't know as I should have held to it this long. But it did just keep us on, the two together. Now that I 'm alone — with even Johnny gone — I 'd far sooner be upon my feet and tiring of myself out, than a sitting folding and folding by the fire. And I 'll tell you why. There 's a deadness steals over me at times, that the kind of life favours and I don't like. Now, I seem to have Johnny in my arms — now, his mother — now, his mother's mother — now, I seem to be a child myself, a lying once again in the arms of my own mother — then I get numbed, thought and senses, till I start out of my seat, afeerd that I 'm a growing like the poor old people that they brick up in the Unions, as you may sometimes see when they let 'em out of the four walls to have a warm in the sun, crawling quite scared about the streets. I was a nimble girl, and have always been a active body, as I told your lady, first time ever I see her good

face. I can still walk twenty mile if I am put to it. I'd far better be a walking than a getting numbed and dreary. I'm a good fair knitter, and can make many little things to sell. The loan from your lady and gentleman of twenty shillings to fit out a basket with would be a fortune for me. Trudging round the country and tiring of myself out, I shall keep the deadness off, and get my own bread by my own labour. And what more can I want?"

"And this is your plan," said the Secretary, "for running away?"

"Show me a better! My deary, show me a better! Why, I know very well," said old Betty Higden, "and you know very well, that your lady and gentleman would set me up like a queen for the rest of my life, if so be that we could make it right among us to have it so. But we can't make it right among us to have it so. I've never took charity yet, nor yet has any one belonging to me. And it would be forsaking of myself indeed, and forsaking of my children dead and gone, and forsaking of their children dead and gone, to set up a contradiction now at last."

"It might come to be justifiable and unavoidable at last," the Secretary gently hinted, with a slight stress on the word.

"I hope it never will! It ain't that I mean to give offence by being anyways proud," said the old creature simply, "but that I want to be of a piece like, and helpful of myself right through to my death."

"And to be sure," added the Secretary, as a comfort for her, "Sloppy will be eagerly looking forward to his opportunity of being to you what you have been to him."

"Trust him for that, sir!" said Betty cheerfully. "Though he had need to be something quick about it, for I'm getting to be an old one. But I'm a strong one, too, and travel and weather never hurt me yet! Now, be so kind as speak for me to your lady and gentleman, and tell 'em what I ask of their good friendliness to let me do, and why I ask it."

The Secretary felt that there was no gainsaying what was urged by this brave old heroine, and he presently repaired to Mrs. Boffin and recommended her to let Betty Higden have her way, at all events for the time. "It would be far more satisfactory to your kind heart, I know," he said, "to provide for her, but it may be a duty to respect this independent spirit."

Mrs. Boffin was not proof against the consideration set before her. She and her husband had worked too, and had brought their simple faith and honour clean out of dust-heaps. If they owed a duty to Betty Higden, of a surety that duty must be done.

"But, Betty," said Mrs. Boffin, when she accompanied John Rokesmith back to his room, and shone upon her with the light of her radiant face, "granted all else, I think I would n't run away."

"'T would come easier to Sloppy," said Mrs. Higden, shaking her head. "'T would come easier to me too. But 't is as you please."

"When would you go?"

"Now," was the bright and ready answer. "To-day, my deary, to-morrow. Bless ye, I am used to it. I know many parts of the country well. When nothing else was to be done, I have worked in many a market-garden afore now, and in many a hop-garden too."

"If I give my consent to your going, Betty — which Mr. Rokesmith thinks I ought to do —"

Betty thanked him with a grateful curtsey.

"— We must not lose sight of you. We must not let you pass out of our knowledge. We must know all about you."

"Yes, my deary, but not through letter-writing, because letter-writing — indeed, writing of most sorts — had n't much come up for such as me when I was young. But I shall be to and fro. No fear of my missing a chance of giving myself a sight of your reviving face. Besides," said Betty, with logical good faith, "I shall have a debt to pay off, by littles, and naturally that would bring me back, if nothing else would."

"*Must* it be done?" asked Mrs. Boffin, still reluctant, of the Secretary.

"I think it must."

After more discussion it was agreed that it should be done, and Mrs. Boffin summoned Bella to note down the little purchases that were necessary to set Betty up in trade. "Don't ye be timorous for me, my dear," said the stanch old heart, observant of Bella's face; "when I take my seat with my work, clean and busy and fresh, in a country market-place, I shall turn a sixpence as sure as ever a farmer's wife there."

The Secretary took that opportunity of touching on the practical question of Mr. Sloppy's capabilities. He would have

made a wonderful cabinet-maker, said Mrs. Higden, "if there had been the money to put him to it." She had seen him handle tools that he had borrowed to mend the mangle, or to knock a broken piece of furniture together, in a surprising manner. As to constructing toys for the Minders, out of nothing, he had done that daily. And once as many as a dozen people had got together in the lane to see the neatness with which he fitted the broken pieces of a foreign monkey's musical instrument. "That 's well," said the Secretary. "It will not be hard to find a trade for him."

John Harmon being buried under mountains now, the Secretary that very day set himself to finish his affairs and have done with him. He drew up an ample declaration, to be signed by Rogue Riderhood (knowing he could get his signature to it, by making him another and much shorter evening call), and then considered to whom should he give the document? To Hexam's son, or daughter? Resolved speedily, to the daughter. But it would be safer to avoid seeing the daughter, because the son had seen Julius Handford, and — he could not be too careful — there might possibly be some comparison of notes between the son and daughter, which would awaken slumbering suspicion, and lead to consequences. "I might even," he reflected, "be apprehended as having been concerned in my own murder!" Therefore, best to send it to the daughter under cover by the post. Pleasant Riderhood had undertaken to find out where she lived, and it was not necessary that it should be attended by a single word of explanation. So far, straight.

But all that he knew of the daughter he derived from Mrs. Boffin's accounts of what she heard from Mr. Lightwood, who seemed to have a reputation for his manner of relating a story, and to have made this story quite his own. It interested him, and he would like to have the means of knowing more — as, for instance, that she received the exonerating paper, and that it satisfied her — by opening some channel altogether independent of Lightwood; who likewise had seen Julius Handford, who had publicly advertised for Julius Handford, and whom of all men he, the Secretary, most avoided. "But with whom the common course of things might bring me in a moment face to face, any day in the week or any hour of the day."

Now, to cast about for some likely means of opening such a channel. The boy, Hexam, was training for and with a school-

master. The Secretary knew it, because his sister's share in that disposal of him seemed to be the best part of Lightwood's account of the family. This young fellow, Sloppy, stood in need of some instruction. If he, the Secretary, engaged the schoolmaster to impart it to him, the channel might be opened. The next point was, did Mrs. Boffin know the schoolmaster's name? No, but she knew where the school was. Quite enough. Promptly, the Secretary wrote to the master of that school, and that very evening Bradley Headstone answered in person.

The Secretary stated to the schoolmaster how the object was to send to him, for certain occasional evening instruction, a youth whom Mr. and Mrs. Boffin wished to help to an industrious and useful place in life. The schoolmaster was willing to undertake the charge of such a pupil. The Secretary inquired on what terms? The schoolmaster stated on what terms. Agreed and disposed of.

"May I ask, sir," said Bradley Headstone, "to whose good opinion I owe a recommendation to you?"

"You should know that I am not the principal here. I am Mr. Boffin's Secretary. Mr. Boffin is a gentleman who inherited a property of which you may have heard some public mention; the Harmon property."

"Mr. Harmon," said Bradley, — who would have been a great deal more at a loss than he was, if he had known to whom he spoke, — "was murdered and found in the river."

"Was murdered and found in the river."

"It was not —"

"No," interposed the Secretary, smiling, "it was not he who recommended you. Mr. Boffin heard of you through a certain Mr. Lightwood. I think you know Mr. Lightwood, or know of him?"

"I know as much of him as I wish to know, sir. I have no acquaintance with Mr. Lightwood, and I desire none. I have no objection to Mr. Lightwood, but I have a particular objection to some of Mr. Lightwood's friends — in short, to one of Mr. Lightwood's friends. His great friend."

He could hardly get the words out, even then and there, so fierce did he grow (though keeping himself down with infinite pains of repression), when the careless and contemptuous bearing of Eugene Wrayburn rose before his mind.

The Secretary saw there was a strong feeling here on some sore point, and he would have made a diversion from it, but for Bradley's holding to it in his cumbersome way.

"I have no objection to mention the friend by name," he said doggedly. "The person I object to is Mr. Eugene Wrayburn."

The Secretary remembered him. In his disturbed recollection of that night when he was striving against the drugged drink, there was but a dim image of Eugene's person; but he remembered his name, and his manner of speaking, and how he had gone with them to view the body, and where he had stood, and what he had said.

"Pray, Mr. Headstone, what is the name," he asked, again trying to make a diversion, "of young Hexam's sister?"

"Her name is Lizzie," said the schoolmaster, with a strong contraction of his whole face.

"She is a young woman of a remarkable character; is she not?"

"She is sufficiently remarkable to be very superior to Mr. Eugene Wrayburn — though an ordinary person might be that," said the schoolmaster; "and I hope you will not think it impertinent in me, sir, to ask why you put the two names together."

"By mere accident," returned the Secretary. "Observing that Mr. Wrayburn was a disagreeable subject with you, I tried to get away from it; though not very successfully, it would appear."

"Do you know Mr. Wrayburn, sir?"

"No."

"Then perhaps the names cannot be put together on the authority of any representation of his?"

"Certainly not."

"I took the liberty to ask," said Bradley, after casting his eyes on the ground, "because he is capable of making any representation, in the swaggering levity of his insolence. I — I hope you will not misunderstand me, sir. I — I am much interested in this brother and sister, and the subject awakens very strong feelings within me. Very, very, strong feelings." With a shaking hand, Bradley took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow.

The Secretary thought, as he glanced at the schoolmaster's

face, that he had opened a channel here indeed, and that it was an unexpectedly dark and deep and stormy one, and difficult to sound. All at once, in the midst of his turbulent emotions, Bradley stopped and seemed to challenge his look. Much as though he suddenly asked him, "What do you see in me?"

"The brother, young Hexam, was your real recommendation here," said the Secretary, quietly going back to the point; "Mr. and Mrs. Boffin happening to know, through Mr. Lightwood, that he was your pupil. Anything that I ask respecting the brother and sister, or either of them, I ask for myself, out of my own interest in the subject, and not in my official character, or on Mr. Boffin's behalf. How I come to be interested, I need not explain. You know the father's connection with the discovery of Mr. Harmon's body."

"Sir," replied Bradley, very restlessly indeed, "I know all the circumstances of that case."

"Pray tell me, Mr. Headstone," said the Secretary. "Does the sister suffer under any stigma because of the impossible accusation — groundless would be a better word — that was made against the father, and substantially withdrawn?"

"No, sir," returned Bradley, with a kind of anger.

"I am very glad to hear it."

"The sister," said Bradley, separating his words over-carefully, and speaking as if he were repeating them from a book, "suffers under no reproach that repels a man of unimpeachable character who has made for himself every step of his way in life, from placing her in his own station. I will not say, raising her to his own station; I say, placing her in it. The sister labours under no reproach, unless she should unfortunately make it for herself. When such a man is not deterred from regarding her as his equal, and when he has convinced himself that there is no blemish on her, I think the fact must be taken to be pretty expressive."

"And there is such a man?" said the Secretary.

Bradley Headstone knotted his brows, and squared his large lower jaw, and fixed his eyes on the ground with an air of determination that seemed unnecessary to the occasion, as he replied, "And there is such a man."

The Secretary had no reason or excuse for prolonging the conversation, and it ended here. Within three hours the oakum-headed apparition once more dived into the Leaving

Shop, and that night Rogue Riderhood's recantation lay in the post-office, addressed under cover to Lizzie Hexam at her right address.

All these proceedings occupied John Rokesmith so much, that it was not until the following day that he saw Bella again. It seemed then to be tacitly understood between them that they were to be as distantly easy as they could, without attracting the attention of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin to any marked change in their manner. The fitting out of old Betty Higden was favourable to this, as keeping Bella engaged and interested, and as occupying the general attention.

"I think," said Rokesmith, when they all stood about her, while she packed her tidy basket, — except Bella, who was busily helping on her knees at the chair on which it stood, — "that at least you might keep a letter in your pocket, Mrs. Higden, which I would write for you and date from here, merely stating, in the names of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, that they are your friends, — I won't say patrons, because they would n't like it."

"No, no, no," said Mr. Boffin; "no patronising! Let 's keep out of *that*, whatever we come to."

"There 's more than enough of that about, without us; ain't there, Noddy?" said Mrs. Boffin.

"I believe you, old lady!" returned the Golden Dustman. "Overmuch indeed!"

"But people sometimes like to be patronised; don't they, sir?" asked Bella, looking up.

"*I* don't. And if *they* do, my dear, they ought to learn better," said Mr. Boffin. "Patrons and Patronesses, and Vice-Patrons and Vice-Patronesses, and Deceased Patrons and Deceased Patronesses, and Ex-Vice-Patrons and Ex-Vice-Patronesses, what does it all mean in the books of the Charities that come pouring in on Rokesmith as he sits among 'em pretty well up to his neck! If Mr. Tom Noakes gives his five shillings ain't he a Patron, and if Mrs. Jack Styles gives her five shillings ain't she a Patroness? What the deuce is it all about? If it ain't stark staring impudence, what do you call it?"

"Don't be warm, Noddy," Mrs. Boffin urged.

"Warm!" cried Mr. Boffin. "It 's enough to make a man smoking hot. I can't go anywhere without being patronised. I don't want to be Patronised. If I buy a ticket for a Flower Show, or a Music Show, or any sort of Show, and pay pretty

heavy for it, why am I to be Patroned and Patronessed as if the Patrons and Patronesses treated me? If there 's a good thing to be done, can't it be done on its own merits? If there 's a bad thing to be done, can it ever be Patroned and Patronessed right? Yet when a new Institution 's going to be built, it seems to me that the bricks and mortar ain't made of half so much consequence as the Patrons and Patronesses; no, nor yet the objects. I wish somebody would tell me whether other countries get Patronised to anything like the extent of this one! And as to the Patrons and Patronesses themselves, I wonder they 're not ashamed of themselves. They ain't Pills, or Hair-Washes, or Invigorating Nervous Essences, to be puffed in that way!"

Having delivered himself of these remarks, Mr. Boffin took a trot, according to his usual custom, and trotted back to the spot from which he had started.

"As to the letter, Rokesmith," said Mr. Boffin, "you 're as right as a trivet. Give her the letter, make her take the letter, put it in her pocket by violence. She might fall sick. — You know you might fall sick," said Mr. Boffin. "Don't deny it, Mrs. Higden, in your obstinacy; you know you might."

Old Betty laughed, and said that she would take the letter and be thankful.

"That 's right!" said Mr. Boffin. "Come! That 's sensible. And don't be thankful to us (for we never thought of it), but to Mr. Rokesmith."

The letter was written, and read to her, and given to her.

"Now, how do you feel?" said Mr. Boffin. "Do you like it?"

"The letter, sir?" said Betty. "Ay, it 's a beautiful letter!"

"No, no, no; not the letter," said Mr. Boffin; "the idea. Are you sure you 're strong enough to carry out the idea?"

"I shall be stronger, and keep the deadness off better, this way, than any way left open to me, sir."

"Don't say than any way left open, you know," urged Mr. Boffin; "because there are ways without end. A housekeeper would be acceptable over yonder at the Bower, for instance. Would n't you like to see the Bower, and know a retired literary man of the name of Wegg that lives there — *with* a wooden leg?"

Old Betty was proof even against this temptation, and fell to adjusting her black bonnet and shawl.

"I would n't let you go, now it comes to this, after all," said Mr. Boffin, "if I did n't hope that it may make a man and a workman of Sloppy, in as short a time as ever a man and a workman was made yet. Why, what have you got there, Betty? Not a doll?"

It was the man in the Guards who had been on duty over Johnny's bed. The solitary old woman showed what it was and put it up quietly in her dress. Then she gratefully took leave of Mrs. Boffin, and of Mr. Boffin, and of Rokesmith, and then put her old withered arms round Bella's young and blooming neck, and said, repeating Johnny's words: "A kiss for the boofer lady."

The Secretary looked on from a doorway at the boofer lady thus encircled, and still looked on at the boofer lady standing alone there, when the determined old figure with its steady bright eyes was trudging through the streets, away from paralysis and pauperism.

CHAPTER XV

THE WHOLE CASE SO FAR

BRADLEY HEADSTONE held fast by that other interview he was to have with Lizzie Hexam. In stipulating for it, he had been impelled by a feeling little short of desperation, and the feeling abided by him. It was very soon after his interview with the Secretary, that he and Charley Hexam set out one leaden evening, not unnoticed by Miss Peecher, to have this desperate interview accomplished.

"That dolls' dressmaker," said Bradley, "is favourable neither to me nor to you, Hexam."

"A pert, crooked, little chit, Mr. Headstone! I knew she would put herself in the way, if she could, and would be sure to strike in with something impertinent. It was on that account that I proposed our going to the City to-night and meeting my sister."

"So I supposed," said Bradley, getting his gloves on his nervous hands as he walked. "So I supposed."

"Nobody but my sister," pursued Charley, "would have found out such an extraordinary companion. She has done it in a ridiculous fancy of giving herself up to another. She told me so, that night when we went there."

"Why should she give herself up to the dressmaker?" asked Bradley.

"Oh!" said the boy, colouring. "One of her romantic ideas! I tried to convince her so, but I did n't succeed. However, what we have got to do is, to succeed to-night, Mr. Headstone, and then all the rest follows."

"You are still sanguine, Hexam."

"Certainly I am, sir. Why, we have everything on our side."

"Except your sister, perhaps," thought Bradley. But he only gloomily thought it, and said nothing.

"Everything on your side," repeated the boy with boyish

confidence. "Respectability, an excellent connection for me, common sense, everything!"

"To be sure, your sister has always shown herself a devoted sister," said Bradley, willing to sustain himself on even that low ground of hope.

"Naturally, Mr. Headstone, I have a good deal of influence with her. And now that you have honoured me with your confidence and spoken to me first, I say again, we have everything on our side."

And Bradley thought again, "Except your sister, perhaps."

A grey, dusty, withered evening in London city has not a hopeful aspect. The closed warehouses and offices have an air of death about them, and the national dread of colour has an air of mourning. The towers and steeples of the many house-encompassed churches, dark and dingy as the sky that seems descending on them, are no relief to the general gloom; a sun-dial on a church-wall has the look, in its useless black shade, of having failed in its business enterprise and stopped payment for ever; melancholy waifs and strays of housekeepers and porters sweep melancholy waifs and strays of papers and pins into the kennels, and other more melancholy waifs and strays explore them, searching and stooping and poking for anything to sell. The set of humanity outward from the City is a set of prisoners departing from jail, and dismal Newgate seems quite as fit a stronghold for the mighty Lord Mayor as his own state-dwelling.

On such an evening, when the city grit gets into the hair and eyes and skin, and when the fallen leaves of the few unhappy city trees grind down in corners under wheels of wind, the schoolmaster and the pupil emerged upon the Leadenhall Street region, spying eastward for Lizzie. Being something too soon in their arrival, they lurked at a corner, waiting for her to appear. The best-looking among us will not look very well, lurking at a corner, and Bradley came out of that disadvantage very poorly indeed.

"Here she comes, Mr. Headstone! Let us go forward and meet her."

As they advanced, she saw them coming, and seemed rather troubled. But she greeted her brother with the usual warmth, and touched the extended hand of Bradley.

"Why, where are you going, Charley, dear?" she asked him then.

"Nowhere. We came on purpose to meet you."

"To meet me, Charley?"

"Yes. We are going to walk with you. But don't let us take the great leading streets where every one walks, and we can't hear ourselves speak. Let us go by the quiet back ways. Here's a large paved court by this church, and quiet, too. Let us go up here."

"But it's not in the way, Charley."

"Yes, it is," said the boy petulantly. "It's in my way, and my way is yours."

She had not released his hand, and still holding it, looked at him with a kind of appeal. He avoided her eyes, under pretence of saying, "Come along, Mr. Headstone." Bradley walked at his side — not at hers — and the brother and sister walked hand in hand. The court brought them to a churchyard; a paved square court, with a raised bank of earth about breast high, in the middle, inclosed by iron rails. Here, conveniently and healthfully elevated above the level of the living, were the dead, and the tombstones; some of the latter droopingly inclined from the perpendicular, as if they were ashamed of the lies they told.

They paced the whole of this place, once, in a constrained and uncomfortable manner, when the boy stopped and said: —

"Lizzie, Mr. Headstone has something to say to you. I don't wish to be an interruption either to him or to you, and so I'll go and take a little stroll and come back. I know in a general way what Mr. Headstone intends to say, and I very highly approve of it, as I hope — and, indeed, I do not doubt — you will. I need n't tell you, Lizzie, that I am under great obligations to Mr. Headstone, and that I am very anxious for Mr. Headstone to succeed in all he undertakes. As I hope — and as, indeed, I don't doubt — you must be."

"Charley," returned his sister, detaining his hand as he withdrew it, "I think you had better stay. I think Mr. Headstone had better not say what he thinks of saying."

"Why, how do you know what it is?" returned the boy.

"Perhaps I don't, but —"

"Perhaps you don't? No, Liz, I should think not. If you knew what it was, you would give me a very different answer.

There; let go; be sensible. I wonder you don't remember that Mr. Headstone is looking on."

She allowed him to separate himself from her, and he, after saying, "Now, Liz, be a rational girl and a good sister," walked away. She remained standing alone with Bradley Headstone, and it was not until she raised her eyes that he spoke.

"I said," he began, "when I saw you last, that there was something unexplained, which might perhaps influence you. I have come this evening to explain it. I hope you will not judge of me by my hesitating manner when I speak to you. You see me at my greatest disadvantage. It is most unfortunate for me that I wish you to see me at my best, and that I know you see me at my worst."

She moved slowly on when he paused, and he moved slowly on beside her.

"It seems egotistical to begin by saying so much about myself," he resumed, "but whatever I say to you seems, even in my own ears, below what I want to say, and different from what I want to say. I can't help it. So it is. You are the ruin of me."

She started at the passionate sound of the last words, and at the passionate action of his hands, with which they were accompanied.

"Yes! you are the ruin — the ruin — the ruin — of me. I have no resource in myself, I have no confidence in myself, I have no government of myself, when you are near me or in my thoughts. And you are always in my thoughts now. I have never been quit of you since I first saw you. Oh, that was a wretched day for me! That was a wretched, miserable day!"

A touch of pity for him mingled with her dislike of him, and she said: "Mr. Headstone, I am grieved to have done you any harm, but I have never meant it."

"There!" he cried despairingly. "Now, I seem to have reproached you, instead of revealing to you the state of my own mind! Bear with me. I am always wrong when you are in question. It is my doom."

Struggling with himself, and by times looking up at the deserted windows of the houses as if there could be anything written in their grimy panes that would help him, he paced the whole pavement at her side, before he spoke again.

"I must try to give expression to what is in my mind; it shall and must be spoken. Though you see me so confounded — though you strike me so helpless — I ask you to believe that there are many people who think well of me; that there are some people who highly esteem me; that I have in my way won a station which is considered worth winning."

"Surely, Mr. Headstone, I do believe it. Surely I have always known it from Charley."

"I ask you to believe that if I were to offer my home such as it is, my station such as it is, my affections such as they are, to any one of the best considered, and best qualified, and most distinguished, among the young women engaged in my calling, they would probably be accepted. Even readily accepted."

"I do not doubt it," said Lizzie, with her eyes upon the ground.

"I have sometimes had it in my thoughts to make that offer and to settle down as many men of my class do; I on the one side of a school, my wife on the other, both of us interested in the same work."

"Why have you not done so?" asked Lizzie Hexam. "Why do you not do so?"

"Far better that I never did! The only one grain of comfort I have had these many weeks," he said, always speaking passionately, and, when most emphatic, repeating that former action of his hands, which was like flinging his heart's blood down before her in drops upon the pavement-stones — "the only one grain of comfort I have had these many weeks is that I never did. For if I had, and if the same spell had come upon me for my ruin, I know I should have broken that tie asunder as if it had been thread."

She glanced at him with a glance of fear, and a shrinking gesture. He answered, as if she had spoken.

"No! It would not have been voluntary on my part, any more than it is voluntary in me to be here now. You draw me to you. If I were shut up in a strong prison, you would draw me out. I should break through the wall to come to you. If I were lying on a sick bed, you would draw me up — to stagger to your feet and fall there."

The wild energy of the man, now quite let loose, was absolutely terrible. He stopped and laid his hand upon a piece of

the coping of the burial-ground inclosure, as if he would have dislodged the stone.

"No man knows till the time comes what depths are within him. To some men it never comes; let them rest and be thankful! To me, you brought it; on me, you forced it; and the bottom of this raging sea," striking himself upon the breast, "has been heaved up ever since."

"Mr. Headstone, I have heard enough. Let me stop you here. It will be better for you and better for me. Let us find my brother."

"Not yet. It shall and must be spoken. I have been in torments ever since I stopped short of it before. You are alarmed. It is another of my miseries that I cannot speak to you or speak of you without stumbling at every syllable, unless I let the check go altogether and run mad. Here is a man lighting the lamps. He will be gone directly. I entreat of you let us walk round this place again. You have no reason to look alarmed; I can restrain myself, and I will."

She yielded to the entreaty — how could she do otherwise? — and they paced the stones in silence. One by one the lights leaped up, making the cold grey church tower more remote, and they were alone again. He said no more until they had regained the spot where he had broken off; there he again stood still, and again grasped the stone. In saying what he said then, he never looked at her; but looked at it and wrenched at it.

"You know what I am going to say. I love you. What other men may mean when they use that expression, I cannot tell; what *I* mean is that I am under the influence of some tremendous attraction which I have resisted in vain, and which overmasters me. You could draw me to fire, you could draw me to water, you could draw me to the gallows, you could draw me to any death, you could draw me to anything I have most avoided, you could draw me to any exposure and disgrace. This and the confusion of my thoughts, so that I am fit for nothing, is what I mean by your being the ruin of me. But if you would return a favourable answer to my offer of myself in marriage, you could draw me to any good — every good — with equal force. My circumstances are quite easy, and you would want for nothing. My reputation stands quite high, and would be a shield for yours. If you saw me at my work, able to do it

well and respected in it, you might even come to take a sort of pride in me; — I would try hard that you should. Whatever considerations I may have thought of against this offer, I have conquered, and I make it with all my heart. Your brother favours me to the utmost, and it is likely that we might live and work together; anyhow, it is certain that he would have my best influence and support. I don't know that I could say more if I tried. I might only weaken what is ill enough said as it is. I only add that if it is any claim on you to be in earnest, I am in thorough earnest, dreadful earnest."

The powdered mortar from under the stone at which he wrenched rattled on the pavement to confirm his words.

"Mr. Headstone — "

"Stop! I implore you, before you answer me, to walk round this place once more. It will give you a minute's time to think, and me a minute's time to get some fortitude together."

Again she yielded to the entreaty, and again they came back to the same place, and again he worked at the stone.

"Is it," he said, with his attention apparently engrossed by it, "yes, or no?"

"Mr. Headstone, I thank you sincerely, I thank you gratefully, and hope you may find a worthy wife before long and be very happy. But it is no."

"Is no short time necessary for reflection; no weeks or days?" he asked, in the same half-suffocated way.

"None whatever."

"Are you quite decided, and is there no chance of any change in my favour?"

"I am quite decided, Mr. Headstone, and I am bound to answer I am certain there is none."

"Then," said he, suddenly changing his tone and turning to her, and bringing his clenched hand down upon the stone with a force that laid the knuckles raw and bleeding; "then I hope that I may never kill him!"

The dark look of hatred and revenge with which the words broke from his livid lips, and with which he stood holding out his smeared hand as if it held some weapon and had just struck a mortal blow, made her so afraid of him that she turned to run away. But he caught her by the arm.

"Mr. Headstone, let me go. Mr. Headstone, I must call for help!"

"It is I who should call for help," he said; "you don't know yet how much I need it."

The working of his face as she shrank from it, glancing round for her brother and uncertain what to do, might have extorted a cry from her in another instant; but all at once he sternly stopped it and fixed it, as if Death itself had done so.

"There! You see I have recovered myself. Hear me out."

With much of the dignity of courage, as she recalled her self-reliant life and her right to be free from accountability to this man, she released her arm from his grasp and stood looking full at him. She had never been so handsome in his eyes. A shade came over them while he looked back at her, as if she drew the very light out of them to herself.

"This time, at least, I will leave nothing unsaid," he went on, folding his hands before him, clearly to prevent his being betrayed into any impetuous gesture; "this last time, at least, I will not be tortured with after-thoughts of a lost opportunity. Mr. Eugene Wrayburn."

"Was it of him you spoke in your ungovernable rage and violence?" Lizzie Hexam demanded with spirit.

He bit his lip, and looked at her, and said never a word.

"Was it Mr. Wrayburn that you threatened?"

He bit his lip again, and looked at her, and said never a word.

"You asked me to hear you out, and you will not speak. Let me find my brother."

"Stay! I threatened no one."

Her look dropped for an instant to his bleeding hand. He lifted it to his mouth, wiped it on his sleeve, and again folded it over the other. "Mr. Eugene Wrayburn," he repeated.

"Why do you mention that name again and again, Mr. Headstone?"

"Because it is the text of the little I have left to say. Observe! There are no threats in it. If I utter a threat, stop me, and fasten it upon me. Mr. Eugene Wrayburn."

A worse threat than was conveyed in his manner of uttering the name could hardly have escaped him.

"He haunts you. You accept favours from him. You are willing enough to listen to *him*. I know it, as well as he does."

"Mr. Wrayburn has been considerate and good to me, sir," said Lizzie proudly, "in connection with the death and with the memory of my poor father."

"No doubt. He is of course a very considerate and a very good man, Mr. Eugene Wrayburn."

"He is nothing to you, I think," said Lizzie, with an indignation she could not repress.

"Oh yes, he is. There you mistake. He is much to me."

"What can he be to you?"

"He can be a rival to me among other things," said Bradley.

"Mr. Headstone," returned Lizzie, with a burning face, "it is cowardly in you to speak to me in this way. But it makes me able to tell you that I do not like you, and that I never have liked you from the first, and that no other living creature has anything to do with the effect you have produced upon me for yourself."

His head bent for a moment, as if under a weight, and he then looked up again, moistening his lips. "I was going on with the little I had left to say. I knew all this about Mr. Eugene Wrayburn, all the while you were drawing me to you. I strove against the knowledge, but quite in vain. It made no difference in me. With Mr. Eugene Wrayburn in my mind, I went on. With Mr. Eugene Wrayburn in my mind, I spoke to you just now. With Mr. Eugene Wrayburn in my mind, I have been set aside and I have been cast out."

"If you give those names to my thanking you for your proposal and declining it, is it my fault, Mr. Headstone?" said Lizzie, compassionating the bitter struggle he could not conceal, almost as much as she was repelled and alarmed by it.

"I am not complaining," he returned, "I am only stating the case. I had to wrestle with my self-respect when I submitted to be drawn to you in spite of Mr. Wrayburn. You may imagine how low my self-respect lies now."

She was hurt and angry; but repressed herself in consideration of his suffering, and of his being her brother's friend.

"And it lies under his feet," said Bradley, unfolding his hands in spite of himself, and fiercely motioning with them both towards the stones of the pavement. "Remember that! It lies under that fellow's feet, and he treads upon it and exults above it."

"He does not!" said Lizzie.

"He does!" said Bradley. "I have stood before him face to face, and he crushed me down in the dirt of his contempt, and walked over me. Why? Because he knew with triumph what was in store for me to-night."

"Oh, Mr. Headstone, you talk quite wildly."

"Quite collectedly. I know what I say too well. Now I have said all. I have used no threat, remember; I have done no more than show you how the case stands; — how the case stands, so far."

At this moment her brother sauntered into view close by. She darted to him, and caught him by the hand. Bradley followed, and laid his heavy hand on the boy's opposite shoulder.

"Charley Hexam, I am going home. I must walk home by myself to-night, and get shut up in my room without being spoken to. Give me half an hour's start, and let me be, till you find me at my work in the morning. I shall be at my work in the morning just as usual."

Clasping his hands, he uttered a short, unearthly, broken cry, and went his way. The brother and sister were left looking at one another near a lamp in the solitary churchyard, and the boy's face clouded and darkened, as he said in a rough tone: "What is the meaning of this? What have you done to my best friend? Out with the truth!"

"Charley!" said his sister. "Speak a little more considerately!"

"I am not in the humour for consideration, or for nonsense of any sort," replied the boy. "What have you been doing? Why has Mr. Headstone gone from us in that way?"

"He asked me — you know he asked me — to be his wife, Charley."

"Well?" said the boy impatiently.

"And I was obliged to tell him that I could not be his wife."

"You were obliged to tell him," repeated the boy angrily, between his teeth, and rudely pushing her away. "You were obliged to tell him! Do you know that he is worth fifty of you?"

"It may easily be so, Charley, but I cannot marry him."

"You mean that you are conscious that you can't appreciate him, and don't deserve him, I suppose?"

"I mean that I do not like him, Charley, and that I will never marry him."

"Upon my soul," exclaimed the boy, "you are a nice picture of a sister! Upon my soul, you are a pretty piece of disinterestedness! And so all my endeavours to cancel the past and to raise myself in the world, and to raise you with me, are to be beaten down by *your* low whims; are they?"

"I will not reproach you, Charley."

"Hear her!" exclaimed the boy, looking round at the darkness. "She won't reproach me! She does her best to destroy my fortunes and her own, and she won't reproach me! Why, you'll tell me, next, that you won't reproach Mr. Headstone for coming out of the sphere to which he is an ornament, and putting himself at *your* feet, to be rejected by *you!*"

"No, Charley, I will only tell you, as I told himself, that I thank him for doing so, that I am sorry he did so, and that I hope he will do much better and be happy."

Some touch of compunction smote the boy's hardening heart as he looked upon her, his patient little nurse in infancy, his patient friend, adviser, and reclaimer in boyhood, the self-forgetting sister who had done everything for him. His tone relented, and he drew her arm through his.

"Now, come, Liz; don't let us quarrel; let us be reasonable and talk this over like brother and sister. Will you listen to me?"

"O Charley!" she replied through her starting tears; "do I not listen to you, and hear many hard things!"

"Then I am sorry. There, Liz! I am unfeignedly sorry. Only you do put me out so. Now see. Mr. Headstone is perfectly devoted to you. He has told me in the strongest manner that he has never been his old self for one single minute since I first brought him to see you. Miss Peecher, our schoolmistress, — pretty and young, and all that, — is known to be very much attached to him, and he won't so much as look at her or hear of her. Now his devotion to you must be a disinterested one; must n't it? If he married Miss Peecher, he would be a great deal better off in all worldly respects than in marrying you. Well, then; he has nothing to get by it, has he?"

"Nothing, Heaven knows!"

"Very well, then," said the boy; "that 's something in his

favour, and a great thing. Then *I* come in. Mr. Headstone has always got me on, and he has a good deal in his power, and of course if he was my brother-in-law he would n't get me on less, but would get me on more. Mr. Headstone comes and confides in me, in a very delicate way, and says, 'I hope my marrying your sister would be agreeable to you, Hexam, and useful to you?' I say, 'There 's nothing in the world, Mr. Headstone, that I could be better pleased with.' Mr. Headstone says, 'Then I may rely upon your intimate knowledge of me for your good word with your sister, Hexam?' And I say, 'Certainly, Mr. Headstone, and naturally I have a good deal of interest with her.' So I have; have n't I, Liz?"

"Yes, Charley."

"Well said! Now, you see, we begin to get on, the moment we begin to be really talking it over, like brother and sister. Very well. Then *you* come in. As Mr. Headstone's wife you would be occupying a most respectable station, and you would be holding a far better place in society than you hold now, and you would at length get quit of the river-side and the old disagreeables belonging to it, and you would be rid for good of dolls' dressmakers and their drunken fathers, and the like of that. Not that I want to disparage Miss Jenny Wren; I dare say she is all very well in her way; but her way is not your way as Mr. Headstone's wife. Now, you see, Liz, on all three accounts — on Mr. Headstone's, on mine, on yours — nothing could be better or more desirable."

They were walking slowly as the boy spoke, and here he stood still, to see what effect he had made. His sister's eyes were fixed upon him; but as they showed no yielding, and as she remained silent, he walked her on again. There was some discomfiture in his tone as he resumed, though he tried to conceal it.

"Having so much influence with you, Liz, as I have, perhaps I should have done better to have had a little chat with you in the first instance, before Mr. Headstone spoke for himself. But really all this in his favour seemed so plain and undeniable, and I knew you to have always been so reasonable and sensible, that I did n't consider it worth while. Very likely that was a mistake of mine. However, it 's soon set right. All that need be done to set it right is for you to tell me at once that I may go home and tell Mr. Headstone that

what has taken place is not final, and that it will all come right by and by."

He stopped again. The pale face looked anxiously and lovingly at him, but she shook her head.

"Can't you speak?" said the boy sharply.

"I am very unwilling to speak, Charley. If I must, I must. I cannot authorise you to say any such thing to Mr. Headstone; I cannot allow you to say any such thing to Mr. Headstone. Nothing remains to be said to him from me, after what I have said for good and all, to-night."

"And this girl," cried the boy, contemptuously throwing her off again, "calls herself a sister!"

"Charley dear, that is the second time that you have almost struck me. Don't be hurt by my words. I don't mean — Heaven forbid! — that you intended it; but you hardly know with what a sudden swing you removed yourself from me."

"However!" said the boy, taking no heed of the remonstrance, and pursuing his own mortified disappointment, "I know what this means, and you shall not disgrace me."

"It means what I have told you, Charley, and nothing more."

"That's not true," said the boy, in a violent tone, "and you know it's not. It means your precious Mr. Wrayburn; that's what it means."

"Charley! If you remember any old days of ours together, forbear!"

"But you shall not disgrace me," doggedly pursued the boy. "I am determined that after I have climbed up out of the mire, you shall not pull me down. You can't disgrace me if I have nothing to do with you, and I *will* have nothing to do with you for the future."

"Charley! On many a night like this, and many a worse night, I have sat on the stones of the street, hushing you in my arms. Unsay those words without even saying you are sorry for them, and my arms are open to you still, and so is my heart."

"I'll not unsay them. I'll say them again. You are an inveterately bad girl, and a false sister, and I have done with you. For ever, I have done with you!"

He threw up his ungrateful and ungracious hand as if it set up a barrier between them, and flung himself upon his heel and

left her. She remained impassive on the same spot, silent and motionless, until the striking of the church clock roused her, and she turned away. But then with the breaking up of her immobility came the breaking up of the waters that the cold heart of the selfish boy had frozen. And "O that I were lying here with the dead!" and "Oh, Charley, Charley, that this should be the end of our pictures in the fire!" were all the words she said, as she laid her face in her hands on the stone coping.

A figure passed by, and passed on, but stopped and looked round at her. It was the figure of an old man with a bowed head, wearing a large-brimmed, low-crowned hat, and a long-skirted coat. After hesitating a little, the figure turned back, and, advancing with an air of gentleness and compassion, said: —

"Pardon me, young woman, for speaking to you, but you are under some distress of mind. I cannot pass upon my way and leave you weeping here alone, as if there was nothing in the place. Can I help you? Can I do anything to give you comfort?"

She raised her head at the sound of these kind words, and answered gladly, "Oh, Mr. Riah, is it you?"

"My daughter," said the old man, "I stand amazed! I spoke as to a stranger. Take my arm, take my arm. What grieves you? Who has done this? Poor girl, poor girl!"

"My brother has quarrelled with me," sobbed Lizzie, "and renounced me."

"He is a thankless dog," said the Jew angrily. "Let him go. Shake the dust from thy feet and let him go. Come, daughter! Come home with me — it is but across the road — and take a little time to recover your peace and to make your eyes seemly, and then I will bear you company through the streets. For it is past your usual time, and will soon be late, and the way is long, and there is much company out of doors to-night."

She accepted the support he offered her, and they slowly passed out of the churchyard. They were in the act of emerging into the main thoroughfare, when another figure loitering discontentedly by, and looking up the street and down it, and all about, started, and exclaimed, "Lizzie! why, where have you been? Why, what 's the matter?"

As Eugene Wrayburn thus addressed her, she drew closer to

the Jew and bent her head. The Jew, having taken in the whole of Eugene at one sharp glance, cast his eyes upon the ground, and stood mute.

"Lizzie, what is the matter?"

"Mr. Wrayburn, I cannot tell you now. I cannot tell you to-night, if I ever can tell you. Pray leave me."

"But, Lizzie, I came expressly to join you. I came to walk home with you, having dined at a coffee-house in this neighbourhood and knowing your hour. And I have been lingering about," added Eugene, "like a bailiff; or," with a look at Riah, "an old clothesman."

The Jew lifted up his eyes, and took in Eugene once more, at another glance.

"Mr. Wrayburn, pray, pray leave me with this protector. And one thing more. Pray, pray be careful of yourself."

"Mysteries of Udolpho!" said Eugene, with a look of wonder. "May I be excused for asking, in the elderly gentleman's presence, who is this kind protector?"

"A trustworthy friend," said Lizzie.

"I will relieve him of his trust," returned Eugene. "But you must tell me, Lizzie, what is the matter?"

"Her brother is the matter," said the old man, lifting up his eyes again.

"Our brother the matter?" returned Eugene, with airy contempt. "Our brother is not worth a thought, far less a tear. What has our brother done?"

The old man lifted up his eyes again, with one grave look at Wrayburn, and one grave glance at Lizzie, as she stood looking down. Both were so full of meaning that even Eugene was checked in his light career, and subsided into a thoughtful "Humph!"

With an air of perfect patience the old man, remaining mute and keeping his eyes cast down, stood, retaining Lizzie's arm, as though, in his habit of passive endurance, it would be all one to him if he had stood there motionless all night.

"If Mr. Aaron," said Eugene, who soon found this fatiguing, "will be good enough to relinquish his charge to me, he will be quite free for any engagement he may have at the Synagogue. Mr. Aaron, will you have the kindness?"

But the old man stood stock still.

"Good evening, Mr. Aaron," said Eugene politely; "we

need not detain you." Then turning to Lizzie, "Is our friend Mr. Aaron a little deaf?"

"My hearing is very good, Christian gentleman," replied the old man calmly; "but I will hear only one voice to-night, desiring me to leave this damsel before I have conveyed her to her home. If she requests it, I will do it. I will do it for no one else."

"May I ask why so, Mr. Aaron?" said Eugene, quite undisturbed in his ease.

"Excuse me. If she asks me, I will tell her," replied the old man. "I will tell no one else."

"I do not ask you," said Lizzie, "and I beg you to take me home. Mr. Wrayburn, I have had a bitter trial to-night, and I hope you will not think me ungrateful, or mysterious, or changeable. I am neither; I am wretched. Pray remember what I said to you. Pray, pray, take care."

"My dear Lizzie," he returned, in a low voice, bending over her on the other side; "of what? Of whom?"

"Of any one you have lately seen and made angry."

He snapped his fingers and laughed. "Come," said he, "since no better may be, Mr. Aaron and I will divide this trust, and see you home together. Mr. Aaron on that side; I on this. If perfectly agreeable to Mr. Aaron, the escort will now proceed."

He knew his power over her. He knew that she would not insist upon his leaving her. He knew that, her fears for him being aroused, she would be uneasy if he were out of her sight. For all his seeming levity and carelessness, he knew whatever he chose to know of the thoughts of her heart.

And going on at her side, so gaily, regardless of all that had been urged against him; so superior in his sallies and self-possession to the gloomy constraint of her suitor and the selfish petulance of her brother; so faithful to her, as it seemed, when her own stock was faithless; what an immense advantage, what an overpowering influence, were his that night! Add to the rest, poor girl, that she had heard him vilified for her sake, and that she had suffered for his, and where the wonder that his occasional tones of serious interest (setting off the carelessness, as if it were assumed to calm her), that his lightest touch, his lightest look, his very presence beside her in the dark common street, were like glimpses of an enchanted world, which it was

natural for jealousy and malice and all meanness to be unable to bear the brightness of, and to gird at as bad spirits might.

Nothing more being said of repairing to Riah's, they went direct to Lizzie's lodging. A little short of the house-door she parted from them, and went in alone.

"Mr. Aaron," said Eugene, when they were left together in the streets, "with many thanks for your company, it remains for me unwillingly to say Farewell."

"Sir," returned the other, "I give you good night, and I wish that you were not so thoughtless."

"Mr. Aaron," returned Eugene, "I give you good night, and I wish (for you are a little dull) that you were not so thoughtful."

But now that his part was played out for the evening, and when in turning his back upon the Jew he came off the stage, he was thoughtful himself. "How did Lightwood's catechism run?" he murmured, as he stopped to light his cigar. "What is to come of it? What are you doing? Where are you going? We shall soon know now. Ah!" with a heavy sigh.

The heavy sigh was repeated as if by an echo, an hour afterwards, when Riah, who had been sitting on some dark steps in a corner over against the house, arose and went his patient way; stealing through the streets in his ancient dress, like the ghost of a departed Time.

CHAPTER XVI

AN ANNIVERSARY OCCASION

THE estimable Twemlow, dressing himself in his lodgings over the stable-yard in Duke Street, St. James's, and hearing the horses at their toilette below, finds himself on the whole in a disadvantageous position as compared with the noble animals at livery. For whereas, on the one hand, he has no attendant to slap him soundingly and require him in gruff accents to come up and come over, still, on the other hand, he has no attendant at all; and the mild gentleman's finger-joints and other joints working rustily in the morning, he could deem it agreeable even to be tied up by the countenance at his chamber door, so he were there skilfully rubbed down and slushed and sluiced and polished and clothed, while himself taking merely a passive part in these trying transactions.

How the fascinating Tippins gets on when arraying herself for the bewilderment of the senses of men is known only to the Graces and her maid; but perhaps even that engaging creature, though not reduced to the self-dependence of Twemlow, could dispense with a good deal of the trouble attendant on the daily restoration of her charms, seeing that as to her face and neck this adorable divinity is, as it were, a diurnal species of lobster — throwing off a shell every forenoon, and needing to keep in a retired spot until the new crust hardens.

Howbeit, Twemlow doth at length invest himself with collar and cravat and wristbands to his knuckles, and goeth forth to breakfast. And to breakfast with whom but his near neighbours, the Lammles of Sackville Street, who have imparted to him that he will meet his distant kinsman, Mr. Fledgeby. The awful Snigsworth might taboo and prohibit Fledgeby, but the peaceable Twemlow reasons, "If he *is* my kinsman, I did n't make him so, and to meet a man is not to know him."

It is the first anniversary of the happy marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Lammle, and the celebration is a breakfast, because a din-

ner on the desired scale of sumptuosity cannot be achieved within less limits than those of the non-existent palatial residence of which so many people are madly envious. So Twemlow tips with not a little stiffness across Piccadilly, sensible of having once been more upright in figure and less in danger of being knocked down by swift vehicles. To be sure that was in the days when he hoped for leave from the dread Snigsworth to do something, or be something in life, and before that magnificent Tartar issued the ukase, "As he will never distinguish himself, he must be a poor gentleman-pensioner of mine, and let him hereby consider himself pensioned."

Ah! my Twemlow! Say, little feeble grey personage, what thoughts are in thy breast to-day, of the Fancy — so still to call her who bruised thy heart when it was green and thy head brown — and whether it be better or worse, more painful or less, to believe in the Fancy to this hour, than to know her for a greedy armour-plated crocodile, with no more capacity of imagining the delicate and sensitive and tender spot behind thy waistcoat than of going straight at it with a knitting-needle. Say likewise, my Twemlow, whether it be the happier lot to be a poor relation of the great, or to stand in the wintry slush giving the hack horses to drink out of the shallow tub at the coach-stand, into which thou hast so nearly set thy uncertain foot. Twemlow says nothing, and goes on.

As he approaches the Lammles' door, drives up a little one-horse carriage, containing Tippins the divine. Tippins, letting down the window, playfully extols the vigilance of her cavalier in being in waiting there to hand her out. Twemlow hands her out with as much polite gravity as if she were anything real, and they proceed up stairs; Tippins all abroad about the legs, and seeking to express that those unsteady articles are only skipping in their native buoyancy.

And dear Mrs. Lammle and dear Mr. Lammle, how do you do, and when are you going down to What 's-its-name place — Guy, Earl of Warwick, you know — what is it? — Dun Cow — to claim the flitch of bacon? And Mortimer, whose name is for ever blotted out from my list of lovers, by reason first of fickleness and then of base desertion, how do *you* do, wretch? And Mr. Wrayburn, *you* here! What can *you* come for, because we are all very sure beforehand that you are not going to talk! And Veneering, M. P., how are things going on down at the

House, and when will you turn out those terrible people for us? And Mrs. Veneering, my dear, can it positively be true that you go down to that stifling place night after night to hear those men prose? Talking of which, Veneering, why don't *you* prose, for you have n't opened your lips there yet, and we are dying to hear what you have got to say to us! Miss Podsnap, charmed to see you. Pa, here? No! Ma, neither? Oh! Mr. Boots! Delighted. Mr. Brewer! This *is* a gathering of the clans. Thus Tippins, and surveys Fledgeby and outsiders through golden glass, murmuring as she turns about and about, in her innocent, giddy way, Anybody else I know? No, I think not. Nobody there. Nobody *there.* Nobody anywhere.

Mr. Lammle, all a glitter, produces his friend Fledgeby, as dying for the honour of presentation to Lady Tippins. Fledgeby presented, has the air of going to say something, has the air of going to say nothing, has an air successively of meditation, of resignation, and of desolation, backs on Brewer, makes the tour of Boots, and fades into the extreme background, feeling for his whisker, as if it might have turned up since he was there five minutes ago.

But Lammle has him out again before he has so much as completely ascertained the bareness of the land. He would seem to be in a bad way, Fledgeby; for Lammle represents him as dying again. He is dying now of want of presentation to Twemlow.

Twemlow offers his hand. Glad to see him. "Your mother, sir, was a connection of mine."

"I believe so," says Fledgeby, "but my mother and her family were two."

"Are you staying in town?" asks Twemlow.

"I always am," says Fledgeby.

"You like town," says Twemlow. But is felled flat by Fledgeby's taking it quite ill, and replying, No, he don't like town. Lammle tries to break the force of the fall by remarking that some people do not like town. Fledgeby retorting that he never heard of any such case but his own, Twemlow goes down again heavily.

"There is nothing new this morning, I suppose?" says Twemlow, returning to the mark with great spirit.

Fledgeby has not heard of anything.

"No, there's not a word of news," says Lammle.
"Not a particle," adds Boots.
"Not an atom," chimes in Brewer.

Somehow the execution of this little concerted piece appears to raise the general spirits as with a sense of duty done, and sets the company a going. Everybody seems more equal than before to the calamity of being in the society of everybody else. Even Eugene standing in a window, moodily swinging the tassel of a blind, gives it a smarter jerk now, as if he found himself in better case.

Breakfast announced. Everything on table showy and gaudy, but with a self-assertingly temporary and nomadic air on the decorations, as boasting that they will be much more showy and gaudy in the palatial residence. Mr. Lammle's own particular servant behind his chair; the Analytical behind Veneering's chair; instances in point that such servants fall into two classes: one mistrusting the master's acquaintances, and the other mistrusting the master. Mr. Lammle's servant of the second class. Appearing to be lost in wonder and low spirits because the police are so long in coming to take his master up on some charge of the first magnitude.

Veneering, M. P., on the right of Mrs. Lammle; Twemlow on her left; Mrs. Veneering, W. M. P. (wife of Member of Parliament), and Lady Tippins on Mr. Lammle's right and left. But be sure that well within the fascination of Mr. Lammle's eye and smile sits little Georgiana. And be sure that close to little Georgiana, also under inspection by the same gingerous gentleman, sits Fledgeby.

Oftener than twice or thrice while breakfast is in progress, Mr. Twemlow gives a little sudden turn towards Mrs. Lammle, and then says to her, "I beg your pardon!" This not being Twemlow's usual way, why is it his way to-day? Why, the truth is, Twemlow repeatedly labours under the impression that Mrs. Lammle is going to speak to him, and turning finds that it is not so, and mostly that she has her eyes upon Veneering. Strange that this impression so abides by Twemlow after being corrected, yet so it is.

Lady Tippins partaking plentifully of the fruits of the earth (including grape-juice in the category) becomes livelier, and applies herself to elicit sparks from Mortimer Lightwood. It is always understood among the initiated, that that faithless

lover must be planted at table opposite to Lady Tippins, who will then strike conversational fire out of him. In a pause of mastication and deglutition, Lady Tippins, contemplating Mortimer, recalls that it was at our dear Veneerings, and in the presence of a party who are surely all here, that he told them his story of the man from somewhere, which afterwards became so horribly interesting and vulgarly popular.

"Yes, Lady Tippins," dissents Mortimer; "as they say on the stage, Even so!"

"Then we expect you," retorts the charmer, "to sustain your reputation, and tell us something else."

"Lady Tippins, I exhausted myself for life that day, and there is nothing more to be got out of me."

Mortimer parries thus, with a sense upon him that elsewhere it is Eugene and not he who is the jester, and that in these circles where Eugene persists in being speechless, he, Mortimer, is but the double of the friend on whom he has founded himself.

"But," quoth the fascinating Tippins, "I am resolved on getting something more out of you. Traitor! what is this I hear about another disappearance?"

"As it is you who have heard it," returns Lightwood, "perhaps you 'll tell us."

"Monster, away!" retorts Lady Tippins. "Your own Golden Dustman referred me to you."

Mr. Lammle, striking in here, proclaims aloud that there is a sequel to the story of the man from somewhere. Silence ensues upon the proclamation.

"I assure you," says Lightwood, glancing round the table, "I have nothing to tell." But Eugene adding in a low voice, "There, tell it, tell it!" he corrects himself with the addition, "Nothing worth mentioning."

Boots and Brewer immediately perceive that it is immensely worth mentioning, and become politely clamorous. Veneering is also visited by a perception to the same effect. But it is understood that his attention is now rather used up, and difficult to hold, that being the tone of the House of Commons.

"Pray don't be at the trouble of composing yourselves to listen," says Mortimer Lightwood, "because I shall have finished long before you have fallen into comfortable attitudes. It 's like —"

"It's like," impatiently interrupts Eugene, "the children's narrative: —

'I 'll tell you a story
Of Jack a Manory,
And now my story 's begun;
I 'll tell you another
Of Jack and his brother,
And now my story is done.'

— Get on and get it over!"

Eugene says this with a sound of vexation in his voice, leaning back in his chair and looking balefully at Lady Tippins, who nods at him as her dear Bear, and playfully insinuates that she (a self-evident proposition) is Beauty, and he Beast.

"The reference," proceeds Mortimer, "which I suppose to be made by my honourable and fair enslaver opposite, is to the following circumstance. Very lately, the young woman, Lizzie Hexam, daughter of the late Jesse Hexam, otherwise Gaffer, who will be remembered to have found the body of the man from somewhere, mysteriously received, she knew not from whom, an explicit retractation of the charges made against her father, by another water-side character of the name of Riderhood. Nobody believed them, because little Rogue Riderhood — I am tempted into the paraphrase by remembering the charming wolf who would have rendered society a great service if he had devoured Mr. Riderhood's father and mother in their infancy — had previously played fast and loose with the said charges, and, in fact, abandoned them. However, the retractation I have mentioned found its way into Lizzie Hexam's hands, with a general flavour on it of having been favoured by some anonymous messenger in a dark cloak and slouched hat, and was by her forwarded, in her father's vindication, to Mr. Boffin, my client. You will excuse the phraseology of the shop, but as I never had another client, and in all likelihood never shall have, I am rather proud of him as a natural curiosity probably unique."

Although as easy as usual on the surface, Lightwood is not quite as easy as usual below it. With an air of not minding Eugene at all, he feels that the subject is not altogether a safe one in that connection.

"The natural curiosity which forms the sole ornament of my professional museum," he resumes, "hereupon desires his Secre-

tary — an individual of the hermit-crab or oyster species, and whose name, I think, is Chokesmith — but it does n't in the least matter — say Artichoke — to put himself in communication with Lizzie Hexam. Artichoke professes his readiness so to do, endeavours to do so, but fails."

"Why fails?" asks Boots.

"How fails?" asks Brewer.

"Pardon me," returns Lightwood, "I must postpone the reply for one moment, or we shall have an anti-climax. Artichoke failing signally, my client refers the task to me; his purpose being to advance the interests of the object of his search. I proceed to put myself in communication with her; I even happen to possess some special means," with a glance at Eugene, "of putting myself in communication with her; but I fail too, because she has vanished."

"Vanished!" is the general echo.

"Disappeared," says Mortimer. "Nobody knows how, nobody knows when, nobody knows where. And so ends the story to which my honourable and fair enslaver opposite referred."

Tippins, with a bewitching little scream, opines that we shall every one of us be murdered in our beds. Eugene eyes her as if some of us would be enough for him. Mrs. Veneering, W. M. P., remarks that these social mysteries make one afraid of leaving Baby. Veneering, M. P., wishes to be informed (with something of a second-hand air of seeing the Right Honourable Gentleman at the head of the Home Department in his place) whether it is intended to be conveyed that the vanished person has been spirited away or otherwise harmed? Instead of Lightwood's answering, Eugene answers, and answers hastily and vexedly: "No, no, no; he does n't mean that; he means voluntarily vanished — but utterly — completely."

However, the great subject of the happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Lammle must not be allowed to vanish with the other vanishments — with the vanishing of the murderer, the vanishing of Julius Handford, the vanishing of Lizzie Hexam, — and therefore Veneering must recall the present sheep to the pen from which they have strayed. Who so fit to discourse of the happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Lammle, they being the dearest and oldest friends he has in the world; or what audience so fit for him to take into his confidence as that audience, a noun of multitude or signifying many, who are all the oldest and dearest

friends he has in the world? So Veneering, without the formality of rising, launches into a familiar oration, gradually toning into the parliamentary sing-song, in which he sees at that board his dear friend Twemlow who on that day twelvemonth bestowed on his dear friend Lammle the fair hand of his dear friend Sophronia, and in which he also sees at that board his dear friends Boots and Brewer, whose rallying round him at a period when his dear friend Lady Tippins likewise rallied round him — ay, and in the foremost rank — he can never forget while Memory holds her seat. But he is free to confess that he misses from that board his dear old friend Podsnap, though he is well represented by his dear young friend Georgiana. And he further sees at that board (this he announces with pomp, as if exulting in the powers of an extraordinary telescope) his friend Mr. Fledgeby, if he will permit him to call him so. For all of these reasons, and many more which he right well knows will have occurred to persons of your exceptional acuteness, he is here to submit to you that the time has arrived when, with our hearts in our glasses, with tears in our eyes, with blessings on our lips, and in a general way with a profusion of gammon and spinach in our emotional larders, we should one and all drink to our dear friends the Lammles, wishing them many many years as happy as the last, and many many friends as congenially united as themselves. And this he will add, that Anastatia Veneering (who is instantly heard to weep) is formed on the same model as her old and chosen friend Sophronia Lammle, in respect that she is devoted to the man who wooed and won her, and nobly discharges the duties of a wife.

Seeing no better way out of it, Veneering here pulls up his oratorical Pegasus extremely short, and plumps down, clean over his head, with "Lammle, God bless you!"

Then Lammle. Too much of him every way; pervadingly too much nose of a coarse wrong shape, and his nose in his mind and his manners; too much smile to be real; too much frown to be false; too many large teeth to be visible at once without suggesting a bite. He thanks you, dear friends, for your kindly greeting, and hopes to receive you — it may be on the next of these delightful occasions — in a residence better suited to your claims on the rites of hospitality. He will never forget that at Veneering's he first saw Sophronia. Sophronia will never forget that at Veneering's she first saw him. They

spoke of it soon after they were married, and agreed that they would never forget it. In fact, to Veneering they owe their union. They hope to show their sense of this some day ("No, no," from Veneering) — oh, yes, yes, and let him rely upon it, they will if they can! His marriage with Sophronia was not a marriage of interest on either side: she had her little fortune, he had his little fortune; they joined their little fortunes; it was a marriage of pure inclination and suitability. Thank you. Sophronia and he are fond of the society of young people; but he is not sure that their house would be a good house for young people proposing to remain single, since the contemplation of its domestic bliss might induce them to change their minds. He will not apply this to any one present; certainly not to their darling little Georgiana. Again thank you! Neither, by the bye, will he apply it to his friend Fledgeby. He thanks Veneering for the feeling manner in which he referred to their common friend Fledgeby, for he holds that gentleman in the highest estimation. Thank you. In fact (returning unexpectedly to Fledgeby), the better you know him, the more you find in him that you desire to know. Again thank you! In his dear Sophronia's name and in his own, thank you!

Mrs. Lammle has sat quite still, with her eyes cast down upon the tablecloth. As Mr. Lammle's address ends, Twemlow once more turns to her involuntarily, not cured yet of that often recurring impression that she is going to speak to him. This time she really is going to speak to him. Veneering is talking with his other next neighbour, and she speaks in a low voice.

"Mr. Twemlow."

He answers, "I beg your pardon? Yes?" Still a little doubtful, because of her not looking at him.

"You have the soul of a gentleman, and I know I may trust you. Will you give me the opportunity of saying a few words to you when you come up stairs?"

"Assuredly. I shall be honoured."

"Don't seem to do so, if you please, and don't think it inconsistent if my manner should be more careless than my words. I may be watched."

Intensely astonished, Twemlow puts his hand to his forehead, and sinks back in his chair meditating. Mrs. Lammle rises. All rise. The ladies go up stairs. The gentlemen soon

saunter after them. Fledgeby has devoted the interval to taking an observation of Boots's whiskers, Brewer's whiskers, and Lammle's whiskers, and considering which pattern of whisker he would prefer to produce out of himself by friction, if the Genie of the cheek would only answer to his rubbing.

In the drawing-room, groups form as usual. Lightwood, Boots, and Brewer, flutter like moths around that yellow wax candle — guttering down, and with some hint of a winding-sheet in it — Lady Tippins. Outsiders cultivate Veneering, M. P., and Mrs. Veneering, W. M. P. Lammle stands with folded arms, Mephistophelian in a corner, with Georgiana and Fledgeby. Mrs. Lammle, on a sofa by a table, invites Mr. Twemlow's attention to a book of portraits in her hand.

Mr. Twemlow takes his station on a settee before her, and Mrs. Lammle shows him a portrait.

"You have reason to be surprised," she says softly, "but I wish you would n't look so."

Disturbed Twemlow, making an effort not to look so, looks much more so.

"I think, Mr. Twemlow, you never saw that distant connection of yours before to-day?"

"No, never."

"Now that you do see him, you see what he is. You are not proud of him?"

"To say the truth, Mrs. Lammle, no."

"If you knew more of him, you would be less inclined to acknowledge him. Here is another portrait. What do you think of it?"

Twemlow had just presence of mind enough to say aloud: "Very like! Uncommonly like!"

"You have noticed, perhaps, whom he favours with his attentions? You notice where he is now, and how engaged?"

"Yes. But Mr. Lammle —"

She darts a look at him which he cannot comprehend, and shows him another portrait.

"Very good; is it not?"

"Charming!" says Twemlow.

"So like as to be almost a caricature? — Mr. Twemlow, it is impossible to tell you what the struggle in my mind has been, before I could bring myself to speak to you as I do now. It is only in the conviction that I may trust you never to

betray me, that I can proceed. Sincerely promise me that you never will betray my confidence, — that you will respect it, even though you may no longer respect me, — and I shall be as satisfied as if you had sworn it."

"Madam, on the honour of a poor gentleman — "

"Thank you. I can desire no more. Mr. Twemlow, I implore you to save that child!"

"That child?"

"Georgiana. She will be sacrificed. She will be inveigled and married to that connection of yours. It is a partnership affair, a money-speculation. She has no strength of will or character to help herself, and she is on the brink of being sold into wretchedness for life."

"Amazing! But what can *I* do to prevent it?" demands Twemlow, shocked and bewildered to the last degree.

"Here is another portrait. And not good, is it?"

Aghast at the light manner of her throwing her head back to look at it critically, Twemlow still dimly perceives the expediency of throwing his own head back, and does so. Though he no more sees the portrait than if it were in China.

"Decidedly not good," says Mrs. Lammle. "Stiff and exaggerated!"

"And ex" — But Twemlow, in his demolished state, cannot command the word, and trails off into — "actly so."

"Mr. Twemlow, your word will have weight with her pompous, self-blinded father. You know how much he makes of your family. Lose no time. Warn him."

"But warn him against whom?"

"Against me."

By great good fortune Twemlow receives a stimulant at this critical instant. The stimulant is Lammle's voice.

"Sophronia, my dear, what portraits are you showing Twemlow?"

"Public characters, Alfred."

"Show him the last of me."

"Yes, Alfred."

She puts the book down, takes another book up, turns the leaves, and presents the portrait to Twemlow.

"That is the last of Mr. Lammle. Do you think it good? — Warn her father against me. I deserve it, for I have been in the scheme from the first. It is my husband's scheme, your

connection's, and mine. I tell you this, only to show you the necessity of the poor, little, foolish, affectionate creature's being befriended and rescued. You will not repeat this to her father. You will spare me so far, and spare my husband. For though this celebration of to-day is all a mockery, he is my husband, and we must live. — Do you think it like?"

Twemlow, in a stunned condition, feigns to compare the portrait in his hand with the original looking towards him from his Mephistophelian corner.

"Very well indeed!" are at length the words which Twemlow with great difficulty extracts from himself.

"I am glad you think so. On the whole, I myself consider it the best. The others are so dark. Now here, for instance, is another of Mr. Lammle —"

"But I don't understand; I don't see my way," Twemlow stammers, as he falters over the book with his glass at his eye. "How warn her father, and not tell him? Tell him how much? Tell him how little? I — I — am getting lost."

"Tell him I am a match-maker; tell him I am an artful and designing woman; tell him you are sure his daughter is best out of my house and my company. Tell him any such things of me; they will all be true. You know what a puffed-up man he is, and how easily you can cause his vanity to take the alarm. Tell him as much as will give him the alarm and make him careful of her, and spare me the rest. Mr. Twemlow, I feel my sudden degradation in your eyes; familiar as I am with my degradation in my own eyes, I keenly feel the change that must have come upon me in yours, in these last few moments. But I trust to your good faith with me as implicitly as when I began. If you knew how often I have tried to speak to you to-day, you would almost pity me. I want no new promise from you on my own account, for I am satisfied, and I always shall be satisfied, with the promise you have given me. I can venture to say no more, for I see that I am watched. If you would set my mind at rest with the assurance that you will interpose with the father and save this harmless girl, close that book before you return it to me, and I shall know what you mean, and deeply thank you in my heart. — Alfred, Mr. Twemlow thinks the last one the best, and quite agrees with you and me."

Alfred advances. The groups break up. Lady Tippins rises

to go, and Mrs. Veneering follows her leader. For the moment, Mrs. Lammle does not turn to them, but remains looking at Twemlow looking at Alfred's portrait through his eye-glass. The moment past, Twemlow drops his eye-glass at its ribbon's length, rises, and closes the book with an emphasis which makes that fragile nursling of the fairies, Tippins, start.

Then good-bye and good-bye, and charming occasion worthy of the Golden Age, and more about the flitch of bacon, and the like of that; and Twemlow goes staggering across Piccadilly with his hand to his forehead, and is nearly run down by a flushed letter-cart, and at last drops safe in his easy-chair, innocent good gentleman, with his hand to his forehead still, and his head in a whirl.